

THE  
CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH





MARGARET LISTENING TO GERARD'S SERMON.

• ARNOLD'S ENGLISH LITERATURE SERIES

# THE CLOISTER AND, THE HEARTH.

BY

CHARLES READE

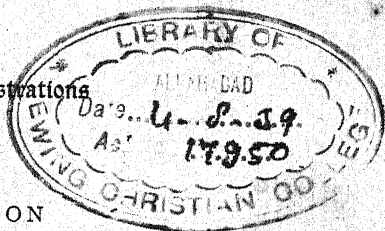
ABRIDGED AND EDITED BY

J. CONNOLLY

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE HEAD MISTRESSES' ASSOCIATION

FOR USE AS A READING-BOOK  
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With Illustrations



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## INTRODUCTION

CHARLES READE was born on June 8, 1814, at Ipsden House in Oxfordshire. Both his father and mother were of good family. He inherited his dramatic instinct from the latter. In 1831 he gained a demyship at Magdalen College, Oxford, and in 1835, having taken a Third Class in honours, he was duly elected to a lay fellowship. The following year he entered Lincoln's Inn, and in 1843 he was called to the Bar. It was not until 1850 that he put pen seriously to paper, writing first for the stage—about thirteen dramas, which nobody would play.

His life after 1852 is little except a record of the production of plays and novels, by the former of which he generally lost money, and by the latter won profit and fame.

He boldly attacked abuses. The treatment of prisoners and the insane aroused his strongest feelings. Many reforms can be traced to his influence and scathing pen.

He made many tours at home and abroad, and his reading was wide and accurate. "The Cloister and the Hearth" is his masterpiece. It was written in 1861. In preparing this shortened edition, the difficulty has been what to leave out, where all was full of interest. Those who have visited the old turret in Queens' College, Cambridge, will be told how Erasmus, the worthy son of true and noble parents, begged the candle-ends to take to his

room, and will be reminded how his father Gerard also craved for them.

The last years of Charles Reade's life were clouded by sorrow and ill-health. He died at Shepherd's Bush on Good Friday, 1885, and was buried in Willesden Churchyard.

He was not one of the greatest novelists of the century, but there are certain passages in his writings which have never been excelled, and of novelists of the second order he is perhaps the best.

Amongst his plays are, "Masks and Faces," written in conjunction with "Tom Taylor" in 1852, "Gold" (1853), and an adaptation of Zola's "L'Assommoir," called "Drink," which was written in 1879.

He wrote eighteen novels. The best known are: "The Cloister and the Hearth," "Peg Woffington" (1852), "Christie Johnstone" (1853), "It is Never too Late to Mend" (1856), and "Hard Cash" (1863).

J. CONNOLLY.

1911.

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THE  
• CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH

CHAPTER I

THERE is a musty chronicle, written in tolerable Latin, and in it a chapter where every sentence holds a fact. Here is told, with harsh brevity, the strange history of a pair, who lived untrumpeted, and died unsung, four hundred years ago; and lie now, as unpitied, in that stern page, as fossils in a rock. Thus, living or dead, Fate is still unjust to them. For if I can but show you what lies below that dry chronicler's words, methinks you will correct the indifference of centuries, and give those two sore-tried souls a place in your heart—for a day.

• It was past the middle of the fifteenth century; Louis XI. was sovereign of France; Edward IV. was wrongful king of England; and Philip "the Good," having by force and cunning dispossessed his cousin Jacqueline, and broken her heart, reigned undisturbed this many years in Holland, where our tale begins.

• Elias, and Catherine his wife, lived in the little town of Tergou. He traded, wholesale and retail, in cloth, silk, brown holland, and, above all, in curried leather, a material highly valued by the middling people, because it would stand twenty years' wear, and turn an ordinary knife, no



small virtue in a jerkin of that century, in which folk were so liberal of their steel; even at dinner a man would leave his meat awhile, and carve you his neighbour, on a very moderate difference of opinion.

The couple were well-to-do, and would have been free from all earthly care, but for nine children. When these were coming into the world, one per annum, each was hailed with rejoicings.

But as the olive-branches shot up, and the parents grew older, and saw with their own eyes the fate of large families, misgivings and care mingled with their love. They belonged to a singularly wise and provident people: in Holland reckless parents were as rare as disobedient children. So now when the huge loaf came in on a gigantic trencher, looking like a fortress in its moat, and the tour of the table once made, seemed to have melted away, Elias and Catherine would look at one another and say, "Who is to find bread for them all when we are gone?"

But the remark awakened the national thoughtfulness of the elder boys, and being often repeated, set several of the family thinking, some of them good thoughts, some ill thoughts, according to the nature of the thinkers.

"Kate, the children grow so, this table will soon be too small."

"We cannot afford it, Eli," replied Catherine, answering not his words, but his thought, after the manner of women.

One day the eldest boy but one, aged nineteen, came to his mother, and, with that outward composure which has so misled some persons as to the real nature of this people, begged her to intercede with his father to send him to Amsterdam, and place him with a merchant. "It is the way of life that likes me: merchants are wealthy; I am good at numbers; prithee, good mother, take my part in this, and I shall ever be, as I am now, your debtor."



Richard was launched; and never cost them another penny: but to fit him out and place him in the house of Vander Stegen, the merchant, took all the little hoard but one gold crown. They began again to save. Then Richard found a place for his brother Jacob.

"And I say Richard and Jacob were the flower of the flock," sobbed Catherine.

"Nay! nay!" said Elias, "our children are good children, and all are dear to us alike. Heed her not! What God takes from us still seems better than what He spares to us: that is to say, men are by nature unthankful—and women silly."

The little coffer was empty again, and to fill it they gathered like ants. They denied themselves in turn the humblest luxuries, and then, catching one another's looks, smiled; perhaps with a greater joy than self-indulgence has to bestow. And so in three years more they had gleaned enough to set up their fourth son as a master-tailor, and their eldest daughter as a robemaker, in Tergou.

Alas! there remained on hand two that were unable to get their bread, and two that were unwilling. The unable ones were—1, Giles, a dwarf, of the wrong sort, half stupidity, half malice, all head and claws and voice, run from by dogs and unprejudiced females, and sided with through thick and thin by his mother; 2, Little Catherine, a poor little girl that could only move on crutches. She lived in pain, but smiled through it, with her marble face and violet eyes and long silky lashes; and fretful or repining word never came from her lips. The unwilling ones were Sybrandt, the youngest, a ne'er-do-weel, too much in love with play to work, and Cornelis, the eldest, who had made calculations, and stuck to the hearth, waiting for dead men's shoes. Almost worn out by their repeated efforts, and, above all, dispirited by the moral and physical

infirmities of those that now remained on hand, the anxious couple would often say, "What will become of all these when we shall be no longer here to take care of them?" But when they had said this a good many times, suddenly the domestic horizon cleared, and then they used still to say it, because a habit is a habit, but they uttered it half mechanically now, and added brightly and cheerfully, "But thanks to St. Bavon and all the saints, there's Gerard."

## CHAPTER II

YOUNG Gerard was for many years of his life a son apart and distinct; object of no fears and no great hopes. No fears; for he was going into the Church; and the Church could always maintain her children by hook or by crook in those days: no great hopes, because his family had no interest with the great to get him a benefice, and the young man's own habits were frivolous, and, indeed, such as our cloth merchant would not have put up with in any one but a clerk that was to be. His trivialities were reading and penmanship, and he was so wrapped up in them that often he could hardly be got away to his meals. The day was never long enough for him: and he carried ever a tinder-box and brimstone matches, and begged ends of candles of the neighbours, which he lighted at unreasonable hours—ay, even at eight of the clock at night in winter, when the very burgomaster was abed. Endured at home, his practices were encouraged by the monks of a neighbouring convent. They had taught him penmanship, and continued to teach him, until one day they discovered, in the middle of a lesson, that he was teaching them. They pointed this out to him in a merry way: he hung his head and blushed: he had suspected as much himself, but mistrusted his judgment in so delicate a matter. "But, my son," said an

elderly monk, "how is it that you, to whom God has given an eye so true, a hand so subtle yet firm, and a heart to love these beautiful crafts—how is it you do not colour as well as write? A scroll looks but barren unless a border of fruit, and leaves, and rich arabesques surround the good words, and charm the sense as those do the soul and understanding; to say nothing of the pictures of holy men and women departed, with which the several chapters should be adorned, and not alone the eye soothed with the brave and sweetly-blended colours, but the heart lifted by effigies of the saints in glory. Answer me, my son."

At this Gerard was confused, and muttered that he had made several trials at illuminating, but had not succeeded well; and thus the matter rested.

Soon after this a fellow-enthusiast came on the scene in the unwonted form of an old lady. Margaret, sister and survivor of the brothers Van Eyck, left Flanders, and came to end her days in her native country. She bought a small house near Tergou. In course of time she heard of Gerard, and saw some of his handiwork: it pleased her so well that she sent her female servant, Reicht Heynes, to ask him to come to her. This led to an acquaintance: it could hardly be otherwise, for little Tergou had never held so many as two zealots of this sort before. At first the old lady damped Gerard's courage terribly. At each visit she fished out of holes and corners drawings and paintings, some of them by her own hand, that seemed to him unapproachable; but if the artist overpowered him, the woman kept his heart up. She and Reicht soon turned him inside out like a glove: among other things, they drew from him what the good monks had failed to hit upon, the reason why he did not illuminate, viz., that he could not afford the gold, the blue, and the red, but only the cheap earths; and that he was afraid to ask his mother to buy the choice

colours, and was sure he should ask her in vain. Then Margaret Van Eyck gave him a little brush-gold, and some vermilion and ultramarine, and a piece of good vellum to lay them on. He almost adored her. As he left the house, Reicht ran after him with a candle and two quarters: he quite kissed her. But better even than the gold and lapis lazuli to the illuminator was the sympathy to the isolated enthusiast, and it was an age in which artists sought out and loved one another.

Backed by an acquaintance so venerable, and strengthened by female sympathy, Gerard advanced in learning and skill.

As a return for all he owed his friends the monks, he made them exquisite copies from two of their choicest MSS., viz., the life of their founder, and their Comedies of Terence, the monastery finding the vellum.

The high and puissant Prince, Philip "the Good," Duke of Burgundy, Luxemburg, and Brabant, Earl of Holland and Zealand, Lord of Friesland, Count of Flanders, Artois, and Hainault, Lord of Salins and Macklyn—was versatile.

He could fight as well as any king going; and he could lie as well as any, except the King of France. He was a mighty hunter, and could read and write. His tastes were wide and ardent. He loved jewels like a woman, and gorgeous apparel. He dearly loved paintings generally; in proof of which he ennobled Jan Van Eyck. He had also a rage for giants, dwarfs, and Turks. In short, he relished all rarities, except the humdrum virtues. For anything singularly pretty, or diabolically ugly, this was your customer. The best of him was, he was open-handed to the poor; and the next best was, he fostered the arts in earnest; whereof he now gave a signal proof. He offered prizes for the best specimens of *orfèvererie* in two kinds, religious and secular: item, for the best paintings in white

of egg, oils, and tempera; these to be on panel, silk, or metal, as the artists chose: item, for the best transparent painting on glass: item, for the best illuminating and border-painting on vellum: item, for the fairest writing on vellum. The burgomasters of the several towns were commanded to aid all the poorer competitors by receiving their specimens and sending them with due care to Rotterdam at the expense of their several burghs. When this was cried by the bellman through the streets of Tergou, a thousand mouths opened, and one heart beat—Gerard's. He told his family timidly he should try for two of those prizes. They stared in silence, for their breath was gone at his audacity: but one horrid laugh exploded on the floor like a petard. Gerard looked down, and there was the dwarf, slit and fanged from ear to ear at his expense, and laughing like a lion. Nature, relenting at having made Giles so small, had given him as a set-off the biggest voice on record. His very whisper was a bassoon. He was like those stunted wide-mouthed pieces of ordnance we see on fortifications; more like a flower-pot than a cannon; but ods tympana how they bellow!

Gerard turned red with anger, the more so as the others began to titter. White Catherine saw, and a pink tinge came on her cheek. She said softly, "Why do you laugh? Is it because he is our brother you think he cannot be capable? Yes, Gerard, try with the rest. Many say you are skilful; and mother and I will pray the Virgin to guide your hand."

"Thank you, little Kate. You shall pray to our Lady, and our mother shall buy me vellum and the colours to illuminate with."

"What will they cost, my lad?"

"Two gold crowns" (about three shillings and fourpence English money).

8 THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH

"What!" screamed the housewife, "when the bushel of rye costs but a groat! What! me spend a month's meal and meat and fire on such vanity as that: the lightning from Heaven would fall on me, and my children would all be beggars."

"Mother!" sighed little Catherine imploringly.

"Oh! it is in vain, Kate," said Gerard, with a sigh. "I shall have to give it up, or ask the dame Van Eyck. She would give it me, but I think shame to be for ever taking from her."

"It is not her affair," said Catherine very sharply; "what has she to do coming between me and my son?" and she left the room with a red face. Little Catherine smiled. Presently the housewife returned with a gracious, affectionate air, and two little gold pieces in her hand.

"There, sweetheart," said she, "you won't have to trouble dame or demoiselle for two paltry crowns."

But on this Gerard fell a-thinking how he could spare her purse.

"One will do, mother. I will ask the good monks to let me send my copy of their 'Terence': it is on snowy vellum, and I can write no better: so then I shall only need six sheets of vellum for my borders and miniatures, and gold for my ground, and prime colours—one crown will do."

"Never tyne the ship for want of a bit of tar, Gerard," said this changeable mother. But she added, "Well, there, I will put the crown in my pocket. That won't be like putting it back in the box. Going to the box to take out instead of putting in, it is like going to my heart with a knife for so many drops of blood. You will be sure to want it, Gerard. The house is never built for less than the builder counted on."

Sure enough, when the time came, Gerard longed to go

to Rotterdam and see the Duke, and, above all, to see the work of his competitors, and so get a lesson from defeat. And the crown came out of the housewife's pocket with a very good grace. Gerard would soon be a priest. It seemed hard if he might not enjoy the world a little before separating himself from it for life.

The night before he went, Margaret Van Eyck asked him to take a letter for her; and when he came to look at it, to his surprise he found it was addressed to the Princess Marie, at the Stadthouse in Rotterdam.

### CHAPTER III

THE day before the prizes were to be distributed, Gerard started for Rotterdam in his holiday suit, to wit, a doublet of silver-gray cloth, with sleeves, and a jerkin of the same over it, but without sleeves. On his head and the back of his neck he wore his flowing hair, and pinned to his back between his shoulders was his hat: it was further secured by a purple silk ribbon little Kate had passed round him from the sides of the hat, and knotted neatly on his breast; below his hat, attached to the upper rim of his broad waist-belt, was his leathern wallet. When he got within a league of Rotterdam he was pretty tired, but he soon fell in with a pair that were more so. He found an old man sitting by the roadside quite worn out, and a comely young woman holding his hand, with a face brimful of concern. The country people trudged by, and noticed nothing amiss; but Gerard, as he passed, drew conclusions. Even dress tells a tale to those who study it so closely as he did, being an illuminator. The old man wore a gown, and a fur tippet, and a velvet cap—sure signs of dignity; but the triangular purse at his girdle was lean, the gown rusty, the fur worn—sure signs of poverty. The young woman was



dressed in plain russet cloth : yet snow-white lawn covered that part of her neck the gown left visible, and ended halfway up her white throat in a little band of gold embroidery : and her head-dress was new to Gerard ; instead of hiding her hair in a pile of linen or lawn, she wore an open network of silver cord with silver spangles at the interstices : in this her glossy auburn hair was rolled in front into two solid waves, and supported behind in a luxurious and shapely mass. His quick eye took in all this, and the old man's pallor, and the tears in the young woman's eyes. So when he had passed them a few yards, he reflected, and turned back, and came towards them bashfully.

"Father, I fear you are tired."

"Indeed, my son, I am," replied the old man, "and faint for lack of food."

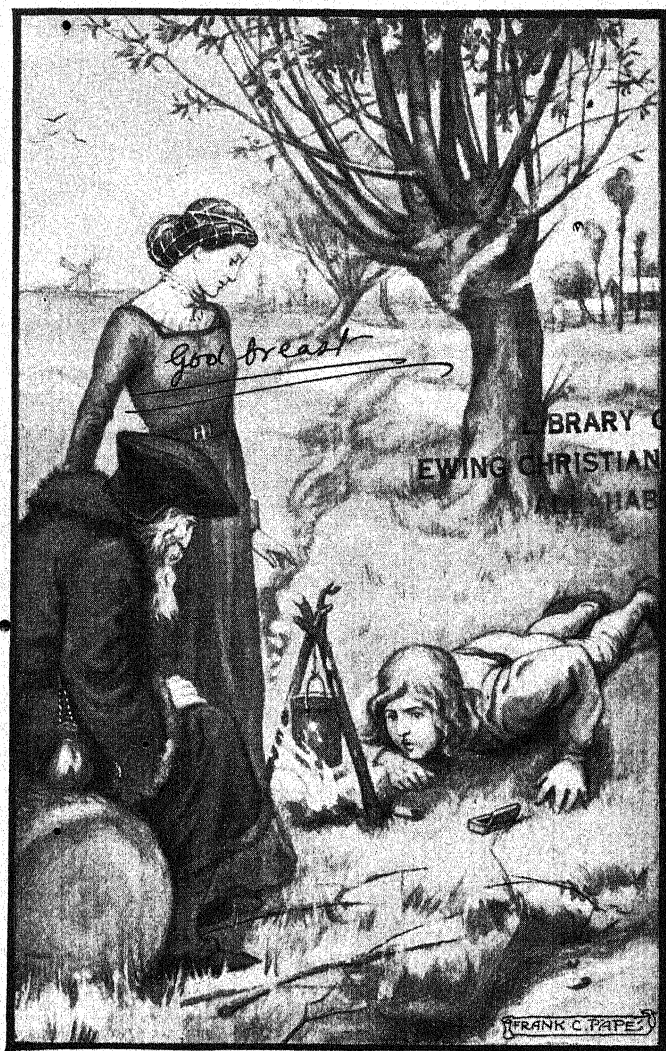
Gerard's address did not appear so agreeable to the girl as to the old man. She seemed ashamed, and with much reserve in her manner said, that it was her fault ; she had underrated the distance, and imprudently allowed her father to start too late in the day.

"No, no !" said the old man ; "it is not the distance, it is the want of nourishment."

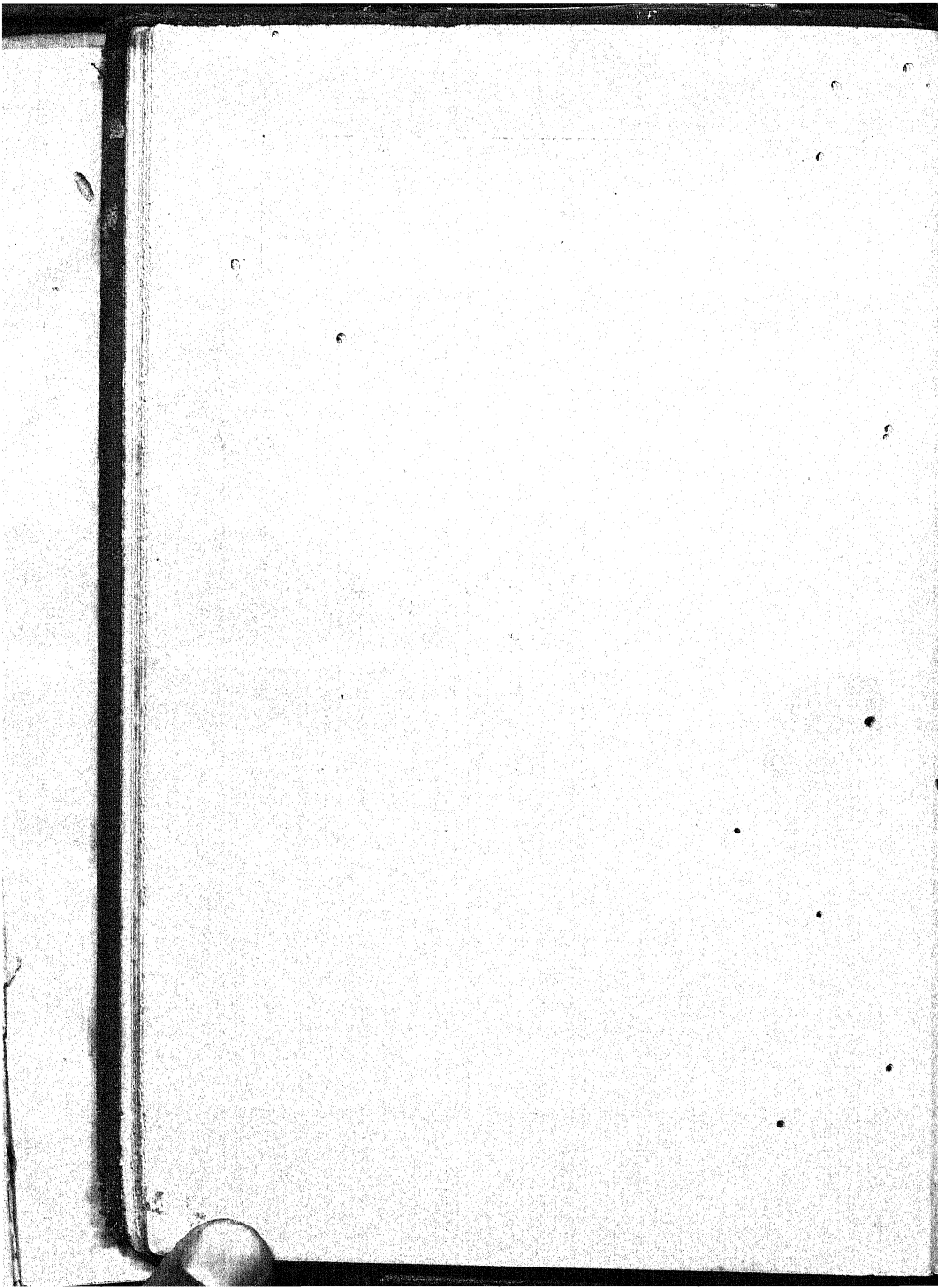
The girl put her arms round his neck with tender concern, but took that opportunity of whispering, "Father, a stranger—a young man !"

But it was too late. Gerard, with simplicity, and quite as a matter of course, fell to gathering sticks with great expedition. This done, he took down his wallet, out with the manchet of bread and the iron flask his careful mother had put up, and his everlasting tinder-box ; lighted a match, then a candle-end, then the sticks ; and put his iron flask on it. Then down he went on his stomach, and took a good blow : then looking up, he saw the girl's face





GERARD KINDLING A FIRE BY THE WAYSIDE.



had thawed, and she was looking down at him and his energy with a demure smile. He laughed back to her. "Mind the pot," said he, "and don't let it spill, for Heaven's sake: there's a cleft stick to hold it safe with;" and with this he set off running towards a corn-field at some distance.

Whilst he was gone, there came by, on a mule with rich purple housings, an old man redolent of wealth. The purse at his girdle was plethoric, the fur on his tippet was ermine, broad and new.

It was Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, the burgomaster of Tergou. He was old, and his face furrowed. He was a notorious miser, and looked one generally. But the idea of supping with the Duke raised him just now into manifest complacency. Yet at the sight of the faded old man and his bright daughter sitting by a fire of sticks, the smile died out of his face, and he wore a strange look of pain and uneasiness. He reined in his mule. "Why, Peter—Margaret," said he, almost fiercely, "what mummary is this?" Peter was going to answer, but Margaret interposed hastily, and said: "My father was exhausted, so I am warming something to give him strength before we go on." "What! reduced to feed by the roadside like the Bohemians," said Ghysbrecht, and his hand went into his purse: but it did not seem at home there; it fumbled uncertainly, afraid too large a coin might stick to a finger and come out.

At this moment who should come bounding up but Gerard. He had two straws in his hand, and he threw himself down by the fire, and relieved Margaret of the cooking part: then suddenly recognising the burgomaster he coloured all over. Ghysbrecht Van Swieten started and glared at him, and took his hand out of his purse. "Oh!" said he bitterly, "I am not wanted," and went slowly on.

Twenty years ago, when Ghysbrecht Van Swieten was a hard and honest man, the touchstone opportunity came to him, and he did an act of heartless roguery. It seemed a safe one. It had hitherto proved a safe one, though he had never felt safe. To-day he had seen youth, enterprise, and, above all, knowledge, seated by fair Margaret and her father on terms that look familiar and loving.

And the fiends are at his ear again.

"The soup is hot," said Gerard.

"But how are we to get it to our mouths?" inquired the senior despondently.

"Father, the young man has brought us straws." And Margaret smiled slily.

"Ay, ay!" said the old man; "but my poor bones are stiff, and indeed the fire is too hot for a body to kneel over with these short straws. St. John the Baptist, but the young man is adroit!"

For, while he stated his difficulty, Gerard removed it. He untied in a moment the knot on his breast, took his hat off, put a stone into each corner of it, then, wrapping his hand in the tail of his jerkin, whipped the flask off the fire, wedged it in between the stones, and put the hat under the old man's nose with a merry smile. The other tremulously inserted the pipe of rye-straw and suck'd. Lo and behold, his wan, drawn face was seen to light up more and more, till it quite glowed; and as soon as he had drawn a long breath—

"Hippocrates and Galen!" he cried, "'tis a *soupe au vin*—the restorative of restoratives. Blessed be the nation that invented it, and the woman that made it, and the young man who brings it to fainting folk. Have a suck, my girl. This corroborative, young sir, was unknown to the ancients."

"Now, this divine elixir gives force to the limbs and

ardour to the spirits; for, note how faint and weary and heart-sick I was a minute ago; well, I suck this celestial cordial, and now behold me brave as Achilles and strong as an eagle."

"Oh, father, now! an eagle, alack!"

"Girl, I defy thee and all the world. Now for the moderns!"

"Father! dear father!"

"Fear me not, girl; I will be brief, unreasonably and unseasonably brief."

"Dear father, prithee add thyself to that venerable company ere the soup cools." And Margaret held the hat imploringly in both hands till he inserted the straw once more.

This spared them the "modern instances," and gave Gerard an opportunity of telling Margaret how proud his mother would be her soup had profited a man of learning.

"Ay! but," said Margaret, "it would like her ill to see her son give all and take none himself. Why brought you but two straws?"

"Fair mistress, I hoped you would let me put my lips to your straw, there being but two."

Margaret smiled and blushed. "Never beg that you may command," said she. "The straw is not mine, 'tis yours: you cut it in yonder field."

"I cut it, and that made it mine; but, after that, your lip touched it, and that made it yours."

"Did it? Then I will lend it you. There—now it is yours again: *your* lip has touched it."

"No, it belongs to us both now. Let us divide it."

"By all means; you have a knife."

"No, I will not cut it—that would be unlucky. I'll bite it. There! I shall keep my half: you will burn yours, once you get home, I doubt."

"You know me not. I waste nothing. It is odds but I make a hairpin of it, or something."

They entered Rotterdam by the Schiedamse Poort; and, as Gerard was unacquainted with the town, Peter directed him the way to the Hoog Straet, in which the Stadthouse was. He himself was going with Margaret to his cousin, in the Ooster-Waagen Straet, so, almost on entering the gate, their roads lay apart. They bade each other a friendly adieu, and Gerard dived into the great town. Then he lamented too late that, out of delicacy, he had not asked his late companions who they were and where they lived.

Falling into this sad reverie, and letting his body go where it would, he lost his way. Soon Gerard emerged, not upon the Stadthouse, but upon a large meadow by the side of the Maas, where games of all sorts were going on: wrestling, the game of palm, the quintain, legerdmain, archery, tumbling, in which art, I blush to say, women as well as men performed, to the great delectation of the company. There was also a trained bear, who stood on his head, and marched upright, and bowed with prodigious gravity to his master; and a hare that beat a drum, and a cock that strutted on little stilts disdainfully. These things made Gerard laugh. He left the river-side, and this time he found the Hoog Straet, which led to the Stadthouse. There was a crowd of persons at the gate endeavouring to enter. It cost Gerard a struggle to get near, and when he was within four heads of the gate, he saw something that made his heart beat; there was Peter, with Margaret on his arm, soliciting humbly for entrance.

"Good people, we are come from far, and my father is old; and my cousin has a new servant that knows us not, and would not let us sit in our cousin's house."

At that moment a hand grasped hers—a magic grasp:



it felt like heart meeting heart, or magnet steel. She turned quickly round at it, and it was Gerard. Such a little cry of joy and appeal came from her bosom, and she began to whimper prettily.

"All is well now," remarked a coarse humorist; "she hath gotten her sweetheart."

"Haw! haw! haw!" went the crowd.

She dropped Gerard's hand directly, and turned round, with eyes flashing through her tears—

"I have no sweetheart, you rude men. But I am friendless in your boorish town, and this is a friend; and one who knows, what you know not, how to treat the aged and the weak."

"I am a competitor, sir."

"What is your name?" and the man at the gate eyed him suspiciously.

"Gerard, the son of Elias."

The janitor inspected a slip of parchment he held in his hand.

"Gerard Eliassoen can enter."

"With my company; these two?"

"Nay; those are not your company: they came before you."

"What matter? They are my friends, and without them I go not in."

"Stay without, then."

"That will I not."

"That we will see."

"We will, and speedily." And with this, Gerard raised a voice of astounding volume and power, and shouted, so that the whole street rang—

"HO! PHILIP, EARL OF HOLLAND! HERE IS ONE OF YOUR VARLETS DEFIES YOU, AND WILL NOT LET YOUR GUESTS PASS IN."

"Hush! murder! The Duke's there. I'm dead," cried the janitor, quaking.

Then suddenly trying to overpower Gerard's thunder, he shouted, with all his lungs—

"OPEN THE GATE, YE KNAVES! WAY THERE FOR GERARD ELIASSEN AND HIS COMPANY! (The fiends go with him!)"

The gate swung open as by magic. Eight soldiers lowered their pikes half-way, and made an arch, under which the victorious three marched in triumph.

Gerard and his friends stood dazzled, spell-bound. Presently a whisper buzzed round them, "Salute the Duke! Salute the Duke!" They looked up, and there on high, under the dais, was their sovereign, bidding them welcome with a kindly wave of the hand. The men bowed low, and Margaret curtsied with a deep and graceful obeisance. The Duke's hand being up, he gave it another turn, and pointed the new-comers out to a knot of valets. Instantly seven of his people, with an obedient start, went headlong at our friends, seated them at a table, and put fifteen many-coloured soups before them, in little silver bowls, and as many wines in crystal vases.

"Girl, he is our guardian angel."

Gerard put his face into his hands.

"Tell me when you have done," said he, "and I will reappear and have my supper, for I am hungry. I know which of us three is the happiest at meeting again."

"Me?" inquired Margaret.

"No: guess again."

"Father?"

"No."

"Then I have no guess which it can be," and she gave a little crow of happiness and gaiety. The soup was tasted, and vanished in a twirl of fourteen hands, and fish



came on the table in a dozen forms, with patties of lobster and almonds mixed, and of almonds and cream. The next trifle was a wild boar, which smelt divine. Why, then, did Margaret start away from it with two shrieks of dismay, and pinch so good a friend as Gerard? Because the Duke's *cuisinier* had been too clever; had made this excellent dish too captivating to the sight as well as taste.

Margaret wheeling round with horror-stricken eyes and her hand on Gerard's shoulder, squeaking and pinching; his face of unwise delight at being pinched, the grizzled brute glaring sulkily on all, and the guests grinning from ear to ear.

"What's to do?" shouted the Duke, hearing the signals of female distress. Seven of his people with a zealous start went headlong and told him. He laughed and said, "Give her of the beef-stuffing, then, and bring me Sir Boar." Benevolent monarch! The beef-stuffing was his own private dish. On these grand occasions an ox was roasted whole, and reserved for the poor. But this wise as well as charitable prince had discovered, that whatever venison, hares, lamb, poultry, etc., you skewered into that beef cavern, got cooked to perfection, retaining their own juices. So, at his word, seven of his people went headlong, and drove silver tridents into the steaming cave at random, and speared a kid, a cygnet, and a flock of wild-fowl. These presently smoked before Gerard and company. After this, twenty different tarts of fruits and herbs, and ast of all, confectionery on a Titanic scale; sipping, meanwhile, hippocras and other spiced drinks, and Greek and Corsican wines, while every now and then little Turkish boys, turbaned, spangled, jewelled, and gilt, came offering on bended knee golden troughs of rose-water and orange-water to keep the guests' hands cool and perfumed.

Gerard remembered he was the bearer of a letter to the

Princess Marie, and, in an undertone, had asked one of the servants if he would undertake to deliver it. The man took it with a deep obeisance: "He could not deliver it himself, but would instantly give it one of the Princess's suite, several of whom were about."

It may be remembered that Peter and Margaret came here not to dine, but to find their cousin.

Meantime, that cousin was seated within a few feet of them, at their backs, and discovered them when Margaret turned round and screamed at the boar. But he forbore to speak to them, for municipal reasons. Margaret was very plainly dressed, and Peter inclined to threadbare. So the alderman said to himself—

"'Twill be time to make up to them when the sun sets and the company disperses: then I will take my poor relations to my house, and none will be the wiser."

Margaret leaned back and half closed her eyes, and murmured to Gerard: "What a lovely scene! the warm sun, the green shade, the rich dresses, the bright music of the lutes and the cool music of the fountain, and all faces so happy and gay! and then, it is to you we owe it."

Gerard was silent all but his eyes; observing which—

"Now, speak not to me," said Margaret languidly; "let me listen to the fountain: what are you a competitor for?"

He told her.

"Very well! You will gain one prize, at least."

"Which? which? Have you seen any of my work?"

"I?—no. But you will gain a prize."

"I hope so: but what makes you think so?"

"Because you were so good to my father. What do you admire most of all these beautiful things, Gerard?"

"You know my name? How is that?"

"White magic. I am a witch."

"Angels are never witches. But I can't think how you——"

"Foolish boy! was it not cried at the gate loud enough, to deave one?"

"So it was. Where is my head? What do I admire most? If you will sit a little more that way, I'll tell you."

"This way?"

"Yes; so that the light may fall on you. There! I see many fair things here, fairer than I could have conceived; but the fairest of all, to my eye, is your lovely hair in its silver frame, and the setting sun kissing it. It minds me of what the Vulgate praises for beauty, '*An apple of gold in a network of silver*,' and oh, what a pity I did not know you before I sent in my poor endeavours at illuminating! I could illuminate so much better now. I could do everything better. There, now the sun is full on it, it is like an aureole. So our Lady looked, and none since her until to-day."

"Oh, fie! it is wicked to talk so. Compare a poor, coarse-favoured girl like me with the Queen of Heaven? Oh, Gerard! I thought you were a good young man." And Margaret was shocked apparently.

Gerard tried to explain. "I am no worse than the rest; but how can I help having eyes, and a heart—Margaret?"

"Gerard!"

"Be not angry now!"

"Now, is it likely?"

"I love you."

"Oh, for shame! you must not say that to me," and Margaret coloured furiously at this sudden assault.

"I can't help it. I love you. I love you."

"Hush, hush! for pity's sake! I must not listen to such words from a stranger."

Then Gerard was frightened at the alarm he caused.

"Forgive me," said he imploringly. "How could anyone help loving you?"

"Well, sir, I will *try* and forgive you—you are so good in other respects; but then you must promise me never to say you—to say *that* again."

Gerard and Margaret sat hand in hand in silence.

And the sun declined; and the air cooled; and the fountain plashed more gently; and the pair throbbed in unison and silence, and this weary world looked heaven to them.

#### CHAPTER IV

A GRAVE, white-haired seneschal came to their table, and inquired courteously whether Gerard Eliassen was of their company. Upon Gerard's answer, he said—

"The Princess Marie would confer with you, young sir. I am to conduct you to her presence."

Gerard gone, William Johnson came forward, acted surprise, and claimed his relations.

"And to think that there was I at your backs, and you saw me not!"

"Nay, cousin Johnson, I saw you long syne," said Margaret coldly.

"You saw me, and spoke not to me?"

"Cousin, it was for you to welcome us to Rotterdam, as it is for us to welcome you at Sevenbergen. Your servant denied us a seat in your house."

"The idiot!"

"And I had a mind to see whether it was 'like maid like master': for there is sooth in bywords."

William Johnson blushed purple. He did the wisest

thing. He insisted on their coming home with him at once, and he would show them whether they were welcome to Rotterdam or not.

"Who doubts it, cousin? Who doubts it?" said the scholar.

Margaret thanked him graciously, but demurred to go just now: said she wanted to hear the minstrels again. In about a quarter of an hour Johnson renewed his proposal. Then her real reason came out.

"It were ill manners to our friend; and he will lose us. He knows not where we lodge in Rotterdam, and the city is large, and we have parted company once already."

"Oh!" said Johnson, "we will provide for that. My young man, ahem! I mean my secretary, shall sit here and wait, and bring him on to my house: he shall lodge with me and with no other."

Margaret felt a thrill of joy that Gerard should be lodged under the same roof with her; then she had a slight mis-giving. "But if your young man should be thoughtless, and go play, and Gerard miss him?"

"He go play? He leave that spot where I put him, and bid him stay? Ho! stand forth, Hans Cloterman."

A figure clad in black serge and dark violet hose arose, and took two steps, and stood before them without moving a muscle.

Hans was then instructed to sit at the table and wait for Gerard, and conduct him to Ooster-Waagen Straet.

As Gerard was long in coming, the patient Hans—his employer's eye being no longer on him—improved the time by quaffing solemnly, silently, and at short but accurately measured intervals, goblets of Corsican wine.

*Then, weary with waiting and overcome by the wine, he rolled on the grass and slept.*

*Gerard was led through several suites of apartments until he reached the presence of the Countess.*

*When she had read Margaret Van Eyck's letter she said—*

"My old friend requests me to be serviceable to you. It is the first favour she has done us the honour of asking us, and the request is sacred. You are in holy orders, sir?"

Gerard bowed.

"I fear you are not a priest, you look too young."

"Oh no, madam; I am not even a sub-deacon. I am only a lector; but next month I shall be an exorcist, and before long an acolyth."

"Well, Monsieur Gerard, with your accomplishments you can soon pass through the inferior orders. And let me beg you to do so. For the day after you have said your first mass I shall have the pleasure of appointing you to a benefice; and I must take care it is not too far from—what call you the place?"

"Tergou, madam."

"A priest gives up much," continued the Countess; "often, I fear, he learns too late how much;" and her woman's eye rested a moment on Gerard with mild pity and half surprise at his resigning her sex, and all the heaven they can bestow, and the great parental joys: "at least, you shall be near your friends. Have you a mother?"

"Yes, madam, thanks be to God!"

"Good! You shall have a church near Tergou. She will thank me. Duchess, oblige me by bidding one of the pages conduct him to the hall of banquet; the way is hard to find."

Gerard bowed low to the Countess and the Princess, and backed towards the door.

Having reached the entrance of the banqueting-hall, he thanked his conductor, and ran hastily with joyful eyes to Margaret. He came in sight of the table—she was gone.



Peter was gone too. Nobody was at the table at all; only a citizen in sober garments had just tumbled under it sound asleep.

Margaret was nowhere in the crowd. He walked through many streets, but could not find her he sought. At last, fairly worn out, he went to a hostelry and slept till day-break. More good fortune fell on him: he almost hated it. At last, on the third day, after he had once more been through every street, he said, "She is not in the town, and I shall never see her again. I will go home." He started for Tergou with royal favour promised, with fifteen golden angels in his purse, a golden medal on his bosom, and a heart like a lump of lead.

It was near four o'clock in the afternoon. Eli was in the shop. His eldest and youngest sons were abroad. Catherine and her little crippled daughter had long been anxious about Gerard, and now they were gone a little way down the road, to see if by good luck he might be visible in the distance; and Giles was alone in the sitting-room.

"Let no one be in care for me," said a faint voice at the door, and in tottered Gerard, pale, dusty, and worn out; and amidst uplifted hands and cries of delight, curiosity, and anxiety mingled, dropped exhausted into the nearest chair.

First of all they must hear about the prizes. Then Gerard told them he had been admitted to see the competitors' works, all laid out in an enormous hall, before the judges pronounced. "Oh, mother! oh, Kate! when I saw the goldsmiths' work, I had liked to have fallen on the floor. I thought not all the goldsmiths on earth had so much gold, silver, jewels, and craft of design and fracture. But, in sooth, all the arts are divine. But, next day, when all the other prizes had been given, they came to the writing, and whose name, think you, was called first?"

"Yours," said Kate.

The others laughed her to scorn.

"You may well laugh," said Gerard, "but for all that, Gerard Eliassoen of Tergou was the name the herald shouted. I stood stupid; they thrust me forward. Everything swam before my eyes. I found myself kneeling on a cushion at the feet of the Duke. He said something to me, but I was so fluttered I could not answer him. So then he put his hand to his side, and did not draw a glaive and cut off my dull head, but gave me a gold medal; and there it is." There was a yell and almost a scramble. "And then he gave me fifteen great bright golden angels. I had seen one before, but I never handled one. Here, there is one for you, our eldest; and one for you, Sybrandt, and one for you, Little Mischief; and two for thee, Little Lily, because God hath afflicted thee; and one for myself, to buy colours and vellum; and nine for her that nursed us all, and risked the two crowns upon poor Gerard's hand."

The gold drew out their characters. Cornelis and Sybrandt clutched each his coin with one glare of greediness and another glare of envy at Kate, who had got two pieces. Giles seized his, and rolled it along the floor and gambolled after it. Kate put down her crutches and sat down, and held out her little arms to Gerard with a heavenly gesture of love and tenderness; and the mother, fairly benumbed at first by the shower of gold that fell on her apron, now cried out, "Leave kissing him, Kate; he is my son, not yours. Ah, Gerard! my boy! I have not loved you as you deserved."

Then Gerard threw himself on his knees beside her, and she flung her arms round him and wept for joy and pride, upon his neck.

"Good lad! good lad!" cried the hosier, with some emotion. "I must go and tell the neighbours. Lend me



the medal, Gerard; I'll show it my good friend, Peter Buyskens; he is ever regaling me with how his son Jorian won the tin mug a-shooting at the butts."

"Ay, do, my man; and show Peter Buyskens one of the angels. Tell him there are fourteen more where that came from. Mind you bring it me back!"

"Stay a minute, father; there is better news behind," said Gerard, flushing with joy at the joy he caused.

"Better! better than this?"

Then Gerard told his interview with the Countess, and the house rang with joy.

"Now, God bless the good lady, and bless the Dame Van Eyck! A benefice? our son! My cares are at an end. Eli, my good friend and master, now we two can die happy whenever our time comes. This dear boy will take our place, and none of these loved ones will want a home or a friend."

From that hour Gerard was looked upon as the stay of the family. He was a son apart, but in another sense. He was always in the right, and nothing too good for him. Cornelis and Sybrandt became more and more jealous of him. The wound love had given him throbbed duller and duller. His success and the affection and admiration of his parents made him think more highly of himself, and resent with more spirit Margaret's ingratitude and discourtesy. For all that, she had power to cool him towards the rest of her sex, and now for every reason he wished to be ordained priest as soon as he could pass the intermediate orders. He knew the Vulgate already better than most of the clergy, and studied the rubric and the dogmas of the Church with his friends the monks; and, the first time the bishop came that way, he applied to be admitted "exorcist," the third step in holy orders. The bishop questioned him, and ordained him at once.

Returning home from the church, he was met by little Kate on her crutches.

"Oh, Gerard! who, think you, hath sent to our house seeking you?—the burgomaster himself."

"Ghysbrecht Van Swieten? What would he with me?"

"Nay, Gerard, I know not. But he seems urgent to see you. You are to go to his house on the instant."

## CHAPTER V

GHYSBRECHT VAN SWIETEN was an artful man. He opened on the novice with something quite wide of the mark he was really aiming at. "The town records," said he, "are crabbedly written, and the ink rusty with age." He offered Gerard the honour of transcribing them fair.

Gerard inquired what he was to be paid.

Ghysbrecht offered a sum that would have just purchased the pens, ink, and parchment.

"But, burgomaster, my labour? Here is a year's work."

"Your time? Why, what is time to you, at two-and-twenty? Then fixing his eyes keenly on Gerard, to mark the effect of his words, he said: "Say, rather, you are idle grown. You are in love. Your body is with these chanting monks, but your heart is with Peter Brandt and his red-haired girl."

"I know no Peter Brandt."

This denial confirmed Ghysbrecht's suspicion that the caster-out of demons was playing a deep game.

"Ye lie!" he shouted. "Did I not find you at her elbow on the road to Rotterdam?"

"Ah!"

"Ah! And you were seen at Sevenbergen but t'other day."

"Was I?"

"Ay; and at Peter's house."

"At Sevenbergen?"

"Ay, at Sevenbergen."

Now, this was what in modern days is called a draw. It was a guess, put boldly forth as fact, to elicit by the young man's answer whether he had been there lately or not.

The result of the artifice surprised the crafty one. Gerard started up in a strange state of nervous excitement.

"Burgomaster," said he, with trembling voice, "I have not been at Sevenbergen these three years, and I know not the name of those you saw me with, nor where they dwelt; but, as my time is precious, though you value it not, give you good-day." And he darted out, with his eyes sparkling.

Ghysbrecht started up in huge ire; but he sank into his chair again.

• "He fears me not. He knows something, if not all."

He soon found out Peter Brandt's cottage; and there sat a girl in the doorway, plying her needle, and a stalwart figure leaned on a long bow and talked to her.

Margaret looked up and dropped her work, and uttered a faint cry, and was white and red by turns. But these signs of emotion were swiftly dismissed, and she turned far more chill and indifferent than she would if she had not betrayed this agitation.

"What! is it you, Master Gerard? What on earth brings you here, I wonder?"

• "I was passing by and saw you; so I thought I would give you good-day, and ask after your father."

"My father's friends are mine."

"That is doubtful. It was not like a friend to promise

to wait for me, and then make off the moment my back was turned. Cruel Margaret! you little know how I searched the town for you; how for want of you nothing was pleasant to me."

"These are idle words; if you had desired my father's company, or mine, you would have come back."

"Margaret, I came back the moment the Countess let me go; but you were not there."

"Nay, you did not, or you had seen Hans Cloterman at our table; we left him to bring you on."

"I saw no one there, but only a drunken man, that had just tumbled down."

"At our table? How was he clad?"

"Nay, I took little heed; in sad-coloured garb."

At this, Margaret's face gradually warmed. Finally, the clouds cleared, and they guessed how the misunderstanding had come about. Neither had been happy since; neither ever would have been happy but for this fortunate meeting.

And Gerard found a MS. Vulgate lying open on the table, and pounced upon it like a hawk. MSS. were his delight; but before he could get to it, two white hands quickly came flat upon the page, and a red face over them.

"Nay, take away your hands, Margaret, that I may see where you are reading, and I will read there, too, at home; so shall my soul meet yours in the sacred page. You will not? Nay, then I must kiss them away." And he kissed them so often, that for very shame they were fain to withdraw, and lo! the sacred book lay open at

"An apple of gold in a network of silver."

"There, now," said she, "I had been hunting for it ever so long, and found it but even now—and to be caught!" and with a touch of inconsistency she pointed it out to Gerard with her white finger.

"Ay," said he, "but to-day it is all hidden in that great cap."

"It is a comely cap, I'm told by some."

"Maybe; but what it hides is beautiful."

"It is not: it is hideous."

"Well, it was beautiful at Rotterdam."

And now Peter came in, and welcomed Gerard cordially, and would have him to stay supper. And Margaret disappeared; and Gerard had a nice learned chat with Peter; and Margaret reappeared with her hair in her silver net, and shot a glance half arch, half coy, and glided about them, and spread supper, and beamed bright with gaiety and happiness. And in the cool evening, Gerard coaxed her out, and she objected, and came; and coaxed her on to the road to Tergou, and she declined, and came; and there they strolled up and down, hand in hand; and when he must go, they pledged each other never to quarrel or misunderstand one another again; and they sealed the promise with a long loving kiss, and Gerard went home on wings.

From that day Gerard spent most of his evenings with Margaret, and the attachment deepened and deepened on both sides, till the hours they spent together were the hours they lived; the rest they counted and underwent. The course of true love ran smoothly, placidly, until it had drawn these two young hearts into its current for ever.

And then——

## CHAPTER VI

*WHILE Gerard and Margaret were happy, ill-fortune was preparing trouble for them. One day Kate had discovered a picture of the Virgin exquisitely illuminated by Gerard. Thinking no harm, she showed it with pride to her mother.*

While looking at it Ghysbrecht Van Swieten came in. Instinctively they hid the picture, and said in surprised tones—

"The burgomaster?"

"Yes! I have come about your son Gerard, who is for ever with Margaret Brandt, the red-haired daughter of Peter Brandt."

Both women laughed at the bare suggestion.

"You wicked man! Gerard is too good to love a creature of earth. Look here!" and with pride they showed the picture of the Virgin.

"Why, it is herself!" gasped the burgomaster.

"A picture of the girl!" said Kate, shocked. "Why, this is our Blessed Lady!"

"No; Margaret Brandt of Sevenbergen village."

At this moment their neighbour Peter Buyskens looked in.

"Oh, neighbour! The burgomaster is blackening our Gerard."

"Stop!" said Van Swieten. "Peter knows the girl. Ask him."

"'Tis Margaret, for very certain," was the reply.

At this moment Elias came in and was told the whole story.

"Marriage never shall be," he said sternly. "He never disobeyed me in his life—he never shall; where is he?"

"At Sevenbergen," said Ghysbrecht.

Supper passed in gloomy silence. After supper Elias said—

"You and I will walk abroad, wife, and talk over our new care."

"Whither?"

"On the road to Sevenbergen, wife."

"You won't speak harshly?"

\* \* \* \*

That night Gerard stayed longer than usual, and went home as happy as a prince. Some distance from home, under the shadow of some trees, he saw his father and mother. A chill fell on him.



"Oh, Gerard!" said his mother.

"Nay," said his father, "you are not the first young fool caught by a red cheek and a pair of blue eyes. Come, Sir Priest, give us your promise to go no more to Sevenbergen, and here all ends."

"I cannot promise, father. I love Margaret, and a priest I shall never be."

"Gainsay me not," said Elias. "You shall learn what it is to disrespect a father."

Gerard said nothing.

From that hour the little house at Tergou was an unhappy home. Cornelis and Sybrandt were more bitter than their father. Little Kate's eyes were brimming at the harsh words she heard.

Gerard could open his heart to no one. He did not dare to confide in Margaret Van Eyck.

Elias told Gerard before the whole family that he had ordered the burgomaster to imprison him in the Stadthouse rather than let him marry Margaret.

"Then hear all," said Gerard. "I will never be a priest while Margaret lives."

And he flung himself out of the house. Outside he met Reicht Heyner, who told him Margaret Van Eyck desired to see him. He found her grim as a judge.

"I thought we had been friends, young sir?"

"Alas! my second mother," said Gerard, "I did not dare to tell you my folly."

"What folly? Is it folly to love?"

"I am told so every day of my life."

"You need not have been afraid to tell my mistress; she is always kind to true lovers."

"Madam—Reicht—I was afraid because I was told——"

"Well, you were told?"

"That in your youth you scorned love, preferring self."

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"I did, boy; and what is the end of it? Behold me here a barren stock, while the women of my youth have a troop of children at their side, and grandchildren at their knee. I gave up the sweet joys of wifehood and motherhood for what? For my dear brothers. They have gone and left me long ago. For my art. I will not let you throw your youth away as I did mine: you shall marry this Margaret. I have inquired, and she is a good daughter. Reicht here is a gossip. She has told me all about it. But that need not hinder you to tell me."

Poor Gerard was overjoyed to be permitted to praise Margaret aloud, and to one who could understand what he loved in her.

"See how pale and thin they have made him amongst them."

"Indeed you are, Master Gerard," said Reicht. "It makes a body sad to see a young man so wasted and worn.—Mistress, when I met him in the street to-day, I had liked to have burst out crying: he was so changed."

"I do not fear my father's violence," he said, "but I do fear his anger. Madam! I sometimes think if I could but marry her secretly, and then take her away to some country where my craft is better paid than in this; and after a year or two, when the storm had blown over, you know, could come back with money in my purse, and say, 'My dear parents, we do not seek your substance, we but ask you to love us once more as you used, and as we have never ceased to love you'—but, alas! I shall be told these are the dreams of an inexperienced young man."

The old lady's eyes sparkled.

"It is no dream, but a piece of wonderful common-sense in a boy. There is a country, Gerard, where certain fortune awaits you at this moment. Here the arts freeze,

but there they flourish, as they never yet flourished in any age or land."

"It is Italy!" cried Gerard. "It is Italy! It has been the dream and hope of my life to visit Italy, the queen of all the arts; oh, madam! But the journey, and we are all so poor."

"Find you the heart to go, I'll find the means. I know where to lay my hand on ten golden angels: they will take you to Rome: and the girl with you, if she loves you as she ought."

Besides the money she procured him for the journey, Margaret Van Eyck gave him money's worth. Said she, "I will tell you secrets that I learned from masters that are gone from me, and have left no fellow behind. Even the Italians know them not; and what I tell you now in Tergou you shall sell dear in Florence. Note my brother Jan's pictures: time, which fades all other paintings, leaves his colours bright as the day they left the easel. The reason is, he did nothing blindly, nothing in a hurry. He trusted to no hireling to grind his colours; he did it himself, or saw it done. His panel was prepared, and prepared again—I will show you how—a year before he laid his colour on. Most of them are quite content to have their work sucked up and lost, sooner than not be in a hurry. Bad painters are always in a hurry. Above all, Gerard, I warn you use but little oil, and never boil it: boiling it melts that vegetable dross into its very heart which it is our business to clear away; for impure oil is death to colour. No; take your oil, and pour it into a bottle with water. In a day or two the water will turn muddy: that is muck from the oil. Pour the dirty water carefully away, and add fresh. When that is poured away, you will fancy the oil is clear. You are mistaken. Reicht, fetch me *that*!" Reicht brought a glass trough with a glass lid

fitting tight. "When your oil has been washed in bottle, put it into this trough with water, and put the trough in the sun all day. You will soon see the water turbid again. But mark, you must not carry this game too far, or the sun will turn your oil to varnish. When it is as clear as crystal, and not too luscious, drain carefully, and cork it up tight. Grind your own prime colours, and lay them on with this oil, and they shall live. Hubert would put sand or salt in the water to clear the oil quicker. But Jan used to say, 'Water will do it best; give water time.' Jan Van Eyck was never in a hurry, and that is why the world will not forget *him* in a hurry."

This and several other receipts, *quæ nunc perscribere longum est*, Margaret gave him with sparkling eyes, and Gerard received them like a legacy from Heaven, so interesting are some things that read uninteresting. Thus provided with money and knowledge, Gerard decided to marry and fly with his wife to Italy. Nothing remained now but to inform Margaret Brandt of his resolution, and to publish the banns as quietly as possible. He went to Sevenbergen earlier than usual on both these errands. He began with Margaret; told her of the Dame Van Eyck's goodness, and the resolution he had come to at last, and invited her co-operation.

She refused it plump.

"No, Gerard; you and I have never spoken of your family, but when you come to marriage——" She stopped, then began again. "I do think your father has no ill-will to me more than to another. He told Peter Buyskens as much, and Peter told me. But so long as he is bent on your being a priest (you ought to have told me this instead of I you), I could not marry you, Gerard, dearly as I love you."

Gerard strove in vain to shake this resolution. He found

it very easy to make her cry, but impossible to make her yield. Then Gerard was impatient and unjust.

"Very well!" he cried; "then you are on their side, and you will drive me to be a priest, for this must end one way or another. My parents hate me in earnest, but my lover only loves me in jest."

And with this wild, bitter speech, he flung away home again, and left Margaret weeping.

Margaret was full of this sweet, womanly pity, when, to her great surprise, scarce an hour and a half after he left her, Gerard came running back to her with the fragments of a picture in his hand, and panting with anger and grief.

"There, Margaret! see! see! the wretches! Look at their spite! They have cut your portrait to pieces."

Margaret looked, and sure enough, some malicious hand had cut her portrait into five pieces. She was a good girl, but she was not ice; she turned red to her very forehead.

"Who did it?"

"Nay, I know not. I dared not ask; for I should hate the hand that did it, ay, till my dying day. My poor Margaret! The butchers, the ruffians! Six months' work cut out of my life, and nothing to show for it now. See, they have hacked through your very face; the sweet face that every one loves who knows it. Oh, heartless, merciless vipers!"

"Never mind, Gerard," said Margaret, panting. "Since this is how they treat you for my sake—Ye rob him of my portrait, do ye? Well, then, he shall have the face itself, such as it is."

"Oh, Margaret!"

"Yes, Gerard; since they are so cruel, I will be the kinder: forgive me for refusing you. I will be your wife: to-morrow, if it is your pleasure."

Gerard kissed her hands with rapture, and then her lips;

and in a tumult of joy ran for Peter and Martin. They came and witnessed the betrothal; a solemn ceremony in those days, and indeed for more than a century later, though now abolished.

## CHAPTER VII

*THE bans of marriage were duly called. The third time, to their dismay, a stranger stood up and forbid them.*

*Outside the church Margaret and Gerard found that a crown would satisfy all objections, which they gladly paid, and the marriage was fixed to take place the next morning.*

*The man who gained the money at once proceeded to drink it away, and bragged of his day's exploit. This was heard by Gerard's bad brothers, who put their heads together to frustrate his happenings. They knew the burgomaster was averse to the match, so they went to him. Elias was at Rotterdam buying cloth. Ghysbrecht Van Swieten said :*

"Since the father of the family is not here, his duty falleth on me, who am the father of the town. I know your father's mind; leave all to me; and, above all, tell not a woman a word of this, least of all the women that are in your own house: for chattering tongues mar wisest counsels."

The next morning, at ten o'clock, Gerard and Margaret were in the church at Sevenbergen, he radiant with joy, she with blushes. Peter was also there, and Martin Wittenhaagen, but no other friend. Secrecy was everything. Margaret had declined Italy. She could not leave her father; he was too learned and too helpless. But it was settled they should retire into Flanders for a few weeks until the storm should be blown over at Tergou. The curé did not keep them waiting long, though it seemed an age.

Presently he stood at the altar, and called them to him. They went hand in hand, the happiest in Holland. The curé opened his book.

But ere he uttered a single word of the sacred rite, a harsh voice cried "Forbear!" And the constables of Tergou came up the aisle and seized Gerard in the name of the law. Martin's long knife flashed out directly.

"Forbear, man!" cried the priest. "What! draw your weapon in a church, and ye who interrupt this holy sacrament, what means this impiety?"

"There is no impiety, father," said the burgomaster's servant respectfully. "This young man would marry against his father's will, and his father has prayed our burgomaster to deal with him according to the law. Let him deny it if he can."

"Is this so, young man?"

Gerard hung his head.

"We take him to Rotterdam to abide the sentence of the Duke."

At this Margaret uttered a cry of despair, and the young creatures, who were so happy a moment ago, fell to sobbing in one another's arms so piteously, that the instruments of oppression drew back a step and were ashamed; but one of them that was good-natured stepped up under pretence of separating them, and whispered to Margaret—

"Rotterdam? it is a lie. We but take him to our Stadthouse."

Gerard was secretly conveyed into the prison of the Stadthouse. He was taken up several flights of stairs and thrust into a small room lighted only by a narrow window, with a vertical iron bar. The whole furniture was a huge oak chest.

Imprisonment in that age was one of the high-roads to death. It is horrible in its mildest form; but in those



days it implied cold, unbroken solitude, torture, starvation, and often poison. Gerard felt he was in the hands of an enemy.

"Oh, the look that man gave me on the road to Rotterdam. There is more here than my father's wrath. I doubt I shall see no more the light of day." And he kneeled down and commended his soul to God.

Presently he rose and sprang at the iron bar of the window, and clutched it. This enabled him to look out by pressing his knees against the wall. It was but for a minute; but in that minute he saw a sight such as none but a captive can appreciate.

Martin Wittenhaagen's back.

Martin was sitting, quietly fishing in the brook near the Stadthouse.

Gerard sprang again at the window, and whistled. Martin instantly showed that he was watching much harder than fishing. He turned hastily round and saw Gerard; made him a signal, and, taking up his line and bow, went quickly off.

Gerard saw by this that his friends were not idle: yet he had rather Martin had stayed. The very sight of him was a comfort. He held on, looking at the soldier's retiring form as long as he could; then falling back somewhat heavily, wrenched the rusty iron bar, held only by rusty nails, away from the stone-work just as Ghysbrecht Van Swieten opened the door stealthily behind him. The burgomaster's eye fell instantly on the iron, and then glanced at the window; but he said nothing. The window was a hundred feet from the ground; and if Gerard had a fancy for jumping out, why should he balk it? He brought a brown loaf and a pitcher of water, and set them on the chest in solemn silence. Gerard's first impulse was to brain him with the iron bar and fly down the stairs; but the burgo-



master seeing something wicked in his eye, gave a little cough, and three stout fellows, armed, showed themselves directly at the door.

"My orders are to keep you thus until you shall bind yourself by an oath to leave Margaret Brandt, and return to the Church, to which you have belonged from your cradle."

"Death sooner."

"With all my heart." And the burgomaster retired.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was nine o'clock on a clear moonlight night; Gerard was still away; the rest of his little family had been some time abed.

A figure stood by the dwarf's bed. It was white, and the moonlight shone on it.

With an unearthly noise, between a yell and a snarl, the gymnast rolled off his bed and under it by a single unbroken movement. A soft voice followed him in his retreat.

• "Why, Giles, are you afraid of me?"

At this, Giles's head peeped cautiously up, and he saw it was only his sister Kate.

She put her finger to her lips. "Hush! lest the wicked Cornelis or the wicked Sybrandt hear us." Giles's claws seized the side of the bed, and he returned to his place by one undivided gymnastic.

Kate then revealed to Giles that she had heard Cornelis and Sybrandt mention Gerard's name; and being herself in great anxiety at his not coming home all day, had listened at their door, and had made a fearful discovery. Gerard was in prison, in the haunted tower of the Stadt-house. He was there, it seemed, by their father's authority. But here must be some treachery; for how could their father have ordered this cruel act? He was at Rotterdam.

She ended by entreating Giles to bear her company to the foot of the haunted tower, to say a word of comfort to poor Gerard, and let him know their father was absent, and would be sure to release him on his return.

"Dear Giles, I would go alone, but I am afraid of the spirits that men say do haunt the tower; but with you I shall not be afraid."

"Nor I with you," said Giles. "I don't believe there are any spirits in Tergou. I never saw one. This last was the likeliest one ever I saw; and it was but you, Kate, after all."

In less than half an hour Giles and Kate opened the house-door cautiously and issued forth. She made him carry a lantern, though the night was bright. "The lantern gives me more courage against the evil spirits," said she.

As the sun declined, Gerard's heart too sank and sank: with the waning light even the embers of hope went out. He was faint, too, with hunger; for he was afraid to eat the food Ghysbrecht had brought him; and hunger alone cowed men. He sat upon the chest, his arms and his head drooping before him—a picture of despondency. Suddenly something struck the wall beyond him very sharply, and then rattled on the floor at his feet. It was an arrow; he saw the white feather. A chill ran through him—they meant then to assassinate him from the outside. He crouched. No more missiles came. He crawled on all fours, and took up the arrow: there was no head to it. He uttered a cry of hope: had a friendly hand shot it? He took it up, and felt it all over: he found a soft substance attached to it. Then one of his eccentricities was of grand use to him. His tinder-box enabled him to strike a light: it showed him two things that made his heart bound with delight, none the less thrilling for being somewhat vague. Attached to the arrow was a skein of silk, and on the arrow itself were words written.

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How his eyes devoured them, his heart panting the while.

Well beloved, make fast the silk to thy knife and lower to us: but hold thine end fast: then count an hundred and draw up.

Gerard seized the oak chest, and with almost superhuman energy dragged it to the window: a moment ago he could not have moved it. Standing on the chest and looking down, he saw figures at the tower foot. They were so indistinct, they looked like one huge form. He waved his bonnet to them with trembling hand: then he undid the silk rapidly but carefully, and made one end fast to his knife, and lowered it till it ceased to draw. Then he counted a hundred. Then pulled the silk carefully up: it came up a little heavier. At last he came to a large knot, and by that knot a stout whipcord was attached to the silk. What could this mean? While he was puzzling himself Margaret's voice came up to him, low but clear, "Draw up, Gerard, till you see liberty." At the word Gerard drew the whipcord line up, and drew and drew till he came to another knot, and found a cord of some thickness take the place of the whipcord. He had no sooner begun to draw this up than he found that he had now a heavy weight to deal with. Looking down, he saw in the moonlight a sight that revived him. He gave a shout of joy, and a score more wild pulls, and lo! a stout new rope touched his hand: he hauled and hauled, and dragged the end into his prison, and instantly passed it through both handles of the chest in succession, and knotted it firmly; then sat for a moment to recover his breath and collect his courage. The first thing was to make sure that the chest was sound, and capable of resisting his weight poised in mid-air. He jumped with all his force upon it. At the third jump the whole side burst open, and out scuttled the contents—a host of parchments.

After the first start and misgiving this gave him, Gerard comprehended that the chest had not burst, but opened : he had doubtless jumped upon some secret spring. Still it shook in some degree his confidence in the chest's powers of resistance ; so he gave it an ally : he took the iron bar and fastened it with the small rope across the large rope, and across the window. He now mounted the chest, and from the chest put his foot through the window, and sat half in and half out, with one hand on that part of the rope, which was inside. In the silent night he heard his own heart beat.

The free air breathed on his face, and gave him the courage to risk what we must all lose one day—for liberty. Many dangers awaited him, but the greatest was the first getting on to the rope outside. Gerard reflected. Finally, he put himself in the attitude of a swimmer, his body to the waist being in the prison, his legs outside. Then holding the inside rope with both hands, he felt anxiously with his feet for the outside rope ; and when he had got it, he worked it in between the soles of his feet, and kept it there tight : then he uttered a short prayer, and, all the calmer for it, put his left hand on the sill and gradually wriggled out. Then he seized the iron bar, and for one fearful moment hung outside from it by his right hand, while his left hand felt for the rope down at his knees ; it was too tight against the wall for his fingers to get round it higher up. The moment he had fairly grasped it, he left the bar, and swiftly seized the rope with the right hand too ; but in this manœuvre his body necessarily fell about a yard. A stifled cry came up from below. Gerard hung in mid-air. He clenched his teeth, and nipped the rope tight with his feet and gripped it with his hands, and went down slowly, hand below hand. He passed by one huge rough stone after another. He saw there was green moss

on one. He looked up and he looked down. The moon shone into his prison window: it seemed very near. The fluttering figures below seemed an awful distance. It made him dizzy to look down; so he fixed his eyes steadily on the wall close to him, and went slowly down, down, down.

He passed a rusty, slimy streak on the wall: it was some ten feet long. The rope made his hands very hot. He stole another look up.

The prison window was a good way off now.

Down—down—down—down.

The rope made his hands sore.

He looked up. The window was so distant, he ventured now to turn his eyes downward again; and there, not more than thirty feet below him, were Margaret and Martin, their faithful hands upstretched to catch him should he fall. He could see their eyes and their teeth shine in the moonlight. For their mouths were open, and they were breathing hard.

"Take care, Gerard! oh, take care! Look not down."

"Fear me not," cried Gerard joyfully, and eyed the wall, but came down faster.

In another minute his feet were at their hands. They seized him ere he touched the ground, and all three clung together in one embrace.

"Hush! away in silence, dear one."

They stole along the shadow of the wall.

Now, ere they had gone many yards, suddenly a stream of light shot from an angle of the building, and lay across their path like a barrier of fire, and they heard whispers and footsteps close at hand.

"Back!" hissed Martin. "Keep in the shade."

They hurried back, passed the dangling rope, and made for a little square projecting tower. They had barely

rounded it when the light shot trembling past them, and flickered uncertainly into the distance.

"A lantern!" groaned Martin, in a whisper. "They are after us."

"Give me my knife," whispered Gerard. "I'll never be taken aliye."

"No, no!" murmured Margaret; "is there no way out where we are?"

"None! none! But I carry six lives at my shoulder;" and, with the word, Martin strung his bow, and fitted an arrow to the string. "In war never wait to be struck: I will kill one or two ere they shall know where their death comes from:" then, motioning his companions to be quiet, he began to draw his bow, and, ere the arrow was quite drawn to the head, he glided round the corner ready to loose the string the moment the enemy should offer a mark.

Gerard and Margaret held their breath in horrible expectation: they had never seen a human being killed.

And now a wild hope, but half repressed, thrilled through Gerard, that this watchful enemy might be the burgomaster in person. The soldier, he knew, would send an arrow through a burgher or burgomaster, as he would through a boar in a wood.

But who may foretell the future, however near? The bow, instead of remaining firm, and loosing the deadly shaft, was seen to waver first, then shake violently, and the stout soldier staggered back to them, his knees knocking and his cheeks blanched with fear. He let his arrow fall, and clutched Gerard's shoulders.

"Let me feel flesh and blood," he gasped. "The haunted tower! the haunted tower!"

His terror communicated itself to Margaret and Gerard. They gasped rather than uttered an inquiry.

"Hush!" he cried, "it will hear you. Up the wall! it



is going *up* the wall! Its head is on fire. *Up* the wall, as mortal creatures walk upon green sward. If you know a prayer, say it; for hell is loose to-night."

"I have power to exercise spirits," said Gerard trembling. "I will venture forth."

"Go alone, then!" said Martin; "I have looked on't once, and live."

"The rope! the rope! It is going up the rope," gasped Gerard.

As they gazed, the glow-worm disappeared in Gerard's late prison, but its light illuminated the cell inside and reddened the window. The white figure stood motionless below.

Such as can retain their senses after the first prostrating effect of the supernatural are apt to experience terror in one of its strangest forms, a wild desire to fling themselves upon the terrible object. It fascinates them as the snake the bird. The great tragedian, Macready, used to render this finely in "Macbeth," at Banquo's second appearance. He flung himself with averted head at the horrible shadow. This strange impulse now seized Margaret. She put down Gerard's hand quietly, and stood bewildered; then, all in a moment, with a wild cry, darted towards the spectre. Gerard, not aware of the natural impulse I have spoken of, never doubted the evil one was drawing her to her perdition. He fell on his knees.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kate and Giles soon reached the haunted tower. Judge their surprise when they found a new rope dangling from the prisoner's window to the ground.

"I see how it is," said the inferior intelligence, taking facts as they came. "Our Gerard has come down this rope. He has got clear. Up I go, and see."

"No Giles, no!" said the superior intelligence, blinded



by prejudice. "See you not this is glamour? This rope is a line the evil one casts out to wile thee to destruction. He knows the weaknesses of all our hearts; he has seen how fond you are of going up things. Where should our Gerard procure a rope? how fasten it in the sky like this? It is not in nature. Holy saints, protect us this night, for hell is abroad."

"Stuff!" said the dwarf; "the way to hell is down, and this rope leads up. I never had the luck to go up such a long rope. It may be years ere I fall in with such a long rope all ready hung for me. As well be knocked on the head at once as never know happiness."

And he sprang on to the rope with a cry of delight, as a cat jumps with a mew on to a table where fish is. All the gymnast was on fire; and the only concession Kate could gain from him was permission to fasten the lantern on his neck first.

"A light scares the ill spirits," said she.

And so, with his huge arms, and his legs like feathers, Giles went up the rope faster than his brother came down it. The light at the nape of his neck made a glow-worm of him. His sister watched his progress with trembling anxiety. Suddenly a female figure started out of the solid masonry, and came flying at her with more than mortal velocity.

Kate uttered a feeble cry. It was all she could, for her tongue clove to her palate with terror. Then she dropped her crutches, and sank upon her knees, hiding her face and moaning—

"Take my body, but spare my soul!"

*Margaret* (panting). "Why, it is a woman!"

*Kate* (quivering). "Why, it is a woman!"

*Margaret*. "How you scared me!"

*Kate*. "I am scared enough myself. Oh! oh! oh!"

"This is strange But the fiery-headed thing? Yet it

was with you, and you are harmless! But why are you here at this time of night?"

"Nay, why are you?"

"Perhaps we are on the same errand? Ah! you are his *good* sister, Kate."

"And you are Margaret Brandt."

"Yea."

"All the better. You love him; you are here. Then Giles was right. He has won free."

Gerard came forward, and put the question at rest. But all further explanation was cut short by a horrible unearthly noise, like a sepulchre ventriloquizing—

"PARCHMENT!—PARCHMENT!—PARCHMENT!"

At each repetition, it rose in intensity. They looked up, and there was the dwarf, with his hands full of parchments, and his face lighted with fiendish joy and lurid with diabolical fire. The light being at his neck, a more infernal "transparency" never startled mortal eye. With the word, the awful imp hurled parchment at the astonished heads below. Down came records, like wounded wild-ducks; some collapsed, others fluttering, and others spread out and wheeling slowly down in airy circles. They had hardly settled, when again the sepulchral roar was heard—"Parchment!—parchment!" and down pattered and sailed another flock of documents: another followed: they whitened the grass. Finally, the fire-headed imp, with his light body and horny hands, slid down the rope like a falling star, and (business before sentiment) proposed to his rescued brother an immediate settlement for the merchandise he had just delivered.

"Hush!" said Gerard; "you speak too loud. Gather them up, and follow us to a safer place than this."

"Will you not come home with me, Gerard?" said little Kate.

"I have no home."

"You shall not say so. Who is more welcome than you will be, after this cruel wrong, to your father's house?"

"Father! I have no father," said Gerard sternly. "He that was my father is turned my gaoler. I have escaped from his hands; I will never come within their reach again."

"An enemy did this, and not our father."

And she told him what she had overheard Cornelis and Sybrandt say. But the injury was too recent to be smoothed. Gerard showed a bitterness of indignation he had hitherto seemed incapable of.

"Cornelis and Sybrandt are two ill curs that have shown me their teeth and their heart a long while; but they could do no more. My father it is that gave the burgomaster authority, or he durst not have laid a finger on me, that am a free burgher of this town. So be it, then. I was his son. I am his prisoner. He has played his part. I shall play mine. Farewell the burgh where I was born, and lived honestly, and was put in prison. While there is another town left in creation, I'll never trouble you again, Tergou."

"Oh, Gerard! Gerard!"

Margaret whispered her: "Do not gainsay him now. Give his choler time to cool!"

Kate turned quickly towards her. "Let me look at your face?" The inspection was favourable, it seemed, for she whispered: "It is a comely face, and no mischief-maker's."

"Fear me not," said Margaret, in the same tone: "I could not be happy without your love, as well as Gerard's."

"These are comfortable words," sobbed Kate. Then, looking up, she said, "I little thought to like you so well. My heart is willing, but my infirmity will not let me embrace you."

At this hint, Margaret wound gently round Gerard's sister, and kissed her lovingly.

"Often he has spoken of you to me, Kate; and often I longed for this."

"You too, Gerard," said Kate, "kiss me ere you go; for my heart lies heavy at parting with you this night."

Gerard kissed her, and she went on her crutches home. The last thing they heard of her was a little patient sigh. Then the tears came and stood thick in Margaret's eyes. But Gerard was a man, and noticed not his sister's sigh.

As they turned to go to Sevenbergen, the dwarf nudged Gerard with his bundle of parchments, and held out a concave claw.

Margaret dissuaded Gerard. "Why take what is not ours?"

"Oh, spoil an enemy how you can."

"But may they not make this a handle for fresh violence?"

"How can they? Think you I shall stay in Tergou after this? The burgomaster robbed me of my liberty; I doubt I should take his life for it, if I could."

• "Oh, fie! Gerard."

"What! Is life worth more than liberty? Well, I can't take his life, so I take the first thing that comes to hand."

He gave Giles a few small coins, with which the urchin was gladdened, and shuffled after his sister. Margaret and Gerard were speedily joined by Martin, and away to Sevenbergen.

## CHAPTER VIII

GHYSBRECHT VAN SWIETEN kept the key of Gerard's prison in his pouch. He waited till ten of the clock ere he visited him; for he said to himself, "A little hunger sometimes does well; it breaks 'em." At ten he crept up the stairs with a loaf and pitcher, followed by his trusty ser-

vant well armed. Ghysbrecht listened at the door. There was no sound inside. A grim smile stole over his features. "By this time he will be as down-hearted as Albert Koestein was," thought he. He opened the door.

No Gerard.

Ghysbrecht stood stupefied.

Although his face was not visible, his body seemed to lose all motion in so peculiar a way, and then after a little he fell a-trembling so, that the servant behind him saw there was something amiss, and crept close to him and peeped over his shoulder. At sight of the empty cell, and the rope, and iron bar, he uttered a loud exclamation of wonder; but, his surprise doubled when his master, disregarding all else, suddenly flung himself on his knees before the empty chest, and felt wildly all over it with quivering hands, as if unwilling to trust his eyes in a matter so important.

The servant gazed at him in utter bewilderment.

"Why, master, what is the matter?"

Ghysbrecht's pale lips worked as if he was going to answer; but they uttered no sound: his hands fell by his side, and he stared into the chest.

"Why, master, what avails glaring into that empty box? The lad is not there. See here! Note the cunning of the young rogue; he hath taken out the bar, and——"

"GONE! GONE! GONE!"

"Gone! What is gone? Holy saints! he is planet-struck."

"STOP THIEF!" shrieked Ghysbrecht, and suddenly turned on his servant and collared him, and shook him with rage. "D'ye stand there, knave, and see your master robbed? Run! fly! A hundred crowns to him that finds it me again. No, no! 'tis in vain. Oh, fool! fool! to leave that in the same room with him. But none ever found the secret spring before. None ever would but he.

It was to be. It is to be. Lost ! lost !" and his years and infirmity now gained the better of his short-lived frenzy, and he sank on the chest, muttering "Lost ! lost !"

"What is lost, master ?" asked the servant kindly.

"House and lands and good name," groaned Ghysbrecht, and wrung his hands feebly.

"WHAT ?" cried the servant.

This emphatic word, and the tone of eager curiosity, struck on Ghysbrecht's ear and revived his natural cunning.

"I have lost the town records," stammered he, and he looked askant at the man like a fox caught near a hen-roost.

"Oh, is that all ?"

"Is't not enough ? What will the burghers say to me ? What will the burgh do ?" Then he suddenly burst out again, "A hundred crowns to him who shall recover them ; all, mind, all that were in this box. If one be missing, I give nothing."

"'Tis a bargain, master : the hundred crowns are in my pouch. See you not that where Gerard Eliassoen is, there are the pieces of sheepskin you rate so high ?"

"That is true ; that is true ; good Dierich ; good, faithful Dierich. All, mind, all that were in the chest."

"Master, I will take the constables to Gerard's house, and seize him for the theft."

"The theft ? ay ! good ; very good. It is theft. I forgot that. So, as he is a thief now, we will put him in the dungeons below, where the toads are and the rats. Dierich, that man must never see daylight again. 'Tis his own fault ; he must be prying. Quick, quick ! ere he has time to talk, you know, time to talk."

In less than half an hour Dierich Brower and four constables entered the hosier's house, and demanded young Gerard of the panic-stricken Catherine.



"Alas! what has he done now?" cried she; "that boy will break my heart."

"Nay, dame, but a trick of youth," said Dierich. "He hath but made off with certain skins of parchment, in a frolic doubtless; but the burgomaster is answerable to the burgh for their safe keeping, so he is in care about them: as for the youth, he will doubtless be quit for a reprimand."

This smooth speech completely imposed on Catherine; but her daughter was more suspicious, and that suspicion was strengthened by the disproportionate anger and disappointment Dierich showed the moment he learned Gerard was not at home, had not been at home that night.

"Come away then," said he roughly. "We are wasting time." He added vehemently, "I'll find him if he is above ground."

Affection sharpens the wits, and often it has made an innocent person more than a match for the wily. As Dierich was going out, Kate made him a signal she would speak with him privately. He bade his men go on, and waited outside the door. She joined him.

"Hush!" she said; "my mother knows not. Gerard has left Tergou."

"How?"

"I saw him last night."

"Ay! Where?" cried Dierich eagerly.

"At the foot of the haunted tower."

"How did he get the rope?"

"I know not; but this I know; my brother Gerard bade me there farewell, and he is many leagues from Tergou ere this. The town, you know, was always unworthy of him, and when it imprisoned him, he vowed never to set foot in it again. Let the burgomaster be content, then. He has imprisoned him, and he has driven him from his birth-



place and from his native land. What need now to rob him and us of our good name?"

This might at another moment have struck Dierich as good sense; but he was too mortified at this escape of Gerard and the loss of a hundred crowns.

"What need had he to steal?" retorted he bitterly.

"Gerard stole not the trash; he but *took* it to spite the burgomaster, who stole his liberty; but he shall answer to the Duke for it, he shall. As for these skins of parchment you keep such a coil about, look in the nearest brook or sty, and 'tis odds but you find them."

"Think ye so, mistress?—think ye so?" And Dierich's eyes flashed. "Mayhap you know 'tis so."

"This I know, that Gerard is too good to steal, and too wise to load himself with rubbish, going a journey."

"Give you good-day, then," said Dierich sharply. "The sheepskin you scorn, I value it more than the skin of any he in Tergou."

And he went off hastily on a false scent.

Kate returned into the house, and drew Giles aside.

"Giles, my heart misgives me; breathe not to a soul what I say to you. I have told Dirk Brower that Gerard is out of Holland, but much I doubt he is not a league from Tergou."

"Why, where is he, then?"

"Where should he be, but with her he loves? But if so, he must not loiter. These be deep and dark and wicked men that seek him. Giles, I see that in Dirk Brower's eye makes me tremble. Oh, why cannot I fly to Sevenbergen and bid him away? Why am I not lusty and active like other girls? God forgive me for fretting at His will; but I never felt till now what it is to be lame and weak and useless. But you are strong, dear Giles," added she coaxingly; "you are very strong."

"Yes, I am strong," thundered Perpusillus; then, catching sight of her meaning, "but I hate to go on foot," he added sulkily.

"Alas! alas! who will help me if you will not? Dear Giles, do you not love Gerard?"

"Yes, I like him best of the lot. I'll go to Sevenbergen on Peter Buyskens his mule. Ask you him, for he won't lend her me."

Kate remonstrated. The whole town would follow him. It would be known whither he was gone, and Gerard be in worse danger than before.

Giles parried this by promising to ride out of the town the opposite way, and not turn the mule's head towards Sevenbergen till he had got rid of the curious.

Kate then assented, and borrowed the mule. She charged Giles with a short but meaning message, and made him repeat it after her over and over, till he could say it word for word.

Giles started on the mule, and little Kate retired, and did the last thing now in her power for her beloved brother—prayed on her knees long and earnestly for his safety.

## CHAPTER IX

"BROTHER Gerard," cried he, in his tremendous voice, "Kate bids you run for your life. They charge you with theft; you have given them a handle. Think not to explain. Hope not for justice in Tergou. The parchments you took, they are but a blind. She hath seen your death in the men's eyes; a price is on your head. Fly! For Margaret's sake and all who love you, loiter not life away, but fly!"

It was a thunder-clap, and left two white faces looking at one another, and at the terrible messenger.

Then Giles, who had hitherto but uttered by rote what Catherine bade him, put in a word of his own.

"All the constables were at our house after you, and so was Dirk Brower. Kate is wise, Gerard. Best give ear to her rede, and fly."

"Oh yes, Gerard," cried Margaret wildly. "Fly on the instant. Ah! those parchments; my mind misgave me; why did I let you take them?"

"Margaret, they are but a blind; Giles says so. No matter: the old caitiff shall never see them again; I will not go till I have hidden his treasure where he shall never find it." Gerard then, after thanking Giles warmly, bade him farewell, and told him to go back and tell Kate he was gone. "For I shall be gone ere you reach home," said he. He then shouted for Martin; and told him what had happened, and begged him to go a little way towards Tergou, and watch the road.

"Ay!" said Martin, "and if I see Dirk Brower or any of his men, I will shoot an arrow into the oak-tree that is in our garden; and on that you must run into the forest hard by, and meet me at the weird hunter's spring. Then I will guide you through the wood."

Surprise thus provided against, Gerard breathed again. He went with Margaret, and while she watched the oak-tree tremblingly, fearing every moment to see an arrow strike among the branches, Gerard dug a deep hole to bury the parchments in.

He threw them in, one by one. They were nearly all charters and records of the burgh; but one appeared to be a private deed between Floris Brandt, father of Peter, and Ghysbrecht.

"Why, this is as much yours as his," said Gerard. "I will read this."

"Oh, not now, Gerard, not now," cried Margaret

"Every moment you lose fills me with fear ; and see, large drops of rain are beginning to fall, and the clouds lower."

Gerard yielded to this remonstrance ; but he put the deed into his bosom, and threw the earth in over the others, and stamped it down. While thus employed there came a flash of lightning, followed by a peal of distant thunder, and the rain came down heavily. Margaret and Gerard ran into the house, whither they were speedily followed by Martin.

"The road is clear," said he, "and a heavy storm coming on."

His words proved true. The thunder came nearer and nearer till it crashed overhead ; the flashes followed one another close, like the strokes of a whip, and the rain fell in torrents. Margaret hid her face not to see the lightning. On this, Gerard put up the rough shutter and lighted a candle. The lovers consulted together, and Gerard blessed the storm that gave him a few hours more with Margaret. The sun set unperceived, and still the thunder pealed, and the lightning flashed, and the rain poured. Supper was set ; but Gerard and Margaret could not eat ; the thought that this was the last time they should sup together choked them. The storm lulled a little. Peter retired to rest. But Gerard was to go at peep of day, and neither he nor Margaret could afford to lose an hour in sleep. Martin sat a while, too ; for he was fitting a new string to his bow, a matter in which he was very nice.

The lovers murmured their sorrows and their love beside him.

Suddenly the old man held up his hand to them to be silent.

They were quiet and listened, and heard nothing. But the next moment a footstep crackled faintly upon the autumn leaves that lay strewn in the garden at the back

door of the house. To those who had nothing to fear such a step would have said nothing: but to those who had enemies it was terrible. For it was a foot trying to be noiseless.

Martin fitted an arrow to his string and hastily blew out the candle. At this moment, to their horror, they heard more than one footstep approach the other door of the cottage, not quite so noiselessly as the other, but very stealthily—and then a dead pause.

Their blood froze in their veins.

"Oh, Kate! oh, Kate! You said fly on the instant." And Margaret moaned and wrung her hands in anguish and terror and wild remorse for having kept Gerard.

"Hush, girl!" said Martin, in a stern whisper.

"A heavy knock fell on the door,  
And on the hearts within."

## CHAPTER X

As if this had been a concerted signal, the back door was struck as rudely the next instant. They were hemmed in. But at these alarming sounds Margaret seemed to recover some share of self-possession. She whispered, "Say he *was* here, but is gone." And with this she seized Gerard and almost dragged him up the rude steps that led to her father's sleeping-room. Her own lay next beyond it.

The blows on the door were repeated.

"Who knocks at this hour?"

"Open, and you will see!"

"I open not to thieves—honest men are all a-bed now."

"Open to the law, Martin Wittenhaagen, or you shall rue it."

"Why, that is Dirk Brower's voice, I trow. What make you so far from Tergou?"

"Open, and you will know."

Martin drew the bolt, very slowly, and in rushed Dierich and four more. They let in their companion who was at the back door.

"Now, Martin, where is Gerard Eliassoen?"

"Gerard Eliassoen? Why, he was here but now."

"Was here?" Dierich's countenance fell. "And where is he now?"

"They say he has gone to Italy. Why, what is to do?"

"No matter. When did he go? Tell me not that he went in such a storm as this!"

"Here is a coil about Gerard Eliassoen," said Martin contemptuously. Then he lighted the candle, and, seating himself coolly by the fire, proceeded to whip some fine silk round his bowstring at the place where the nick of the arrow frets it. "I'll tell you," said he carelessly. "Know you his brother Giles—a little misbegotten imp, all head and arms? Well he came tearing over here on a mule, and bawled out something. I was too far off to hear the creature's words, but only its noise. Anyway, he started Gerard. For as soon as he was gone, there was such crying and kissing, and then Gerard went away. They do tell me he has gone to Italy—mayhap you know where that is: for I don't."

Dierich's countenance fell lower and lower at this account. There was no flaw in it. A cunninger man than Martin would perhaps have told a lie too many, and raised suspicion. But Martin did his task well. He only told the one falsehood he was bade to tell, and of his own head invented nothing.

"Mates," said Dierich, "I doubt he speaks sooth. I told the burgomaster how 'twould be. He met the dwarf galloping Peter Buyskens' mule from Sevenbergen. 'They have sent that imp to Gerard,' says he, 'so, then, Gerard



is at Sevenbergen.' 'Ah, master!' says I, 'tis too late now. We should have thought of Sevenbergen before, instead of wasting our time hunting all the odd corners of Tergou for those cursed parchments that we shall never find till we find the man that took 'em. If he was at Sevenbergen,' quoth I, 'and they sent the dwarf to him, it must have been to warn him we are after him.' He is leagues away by now,' quoth I. Confound that chalk-faced girl! she has outwitted us bearded men; and so I told the burgomaster, but he would not hear reason. A wet jerkin apiece, that is all we shall get, mates, by this job."

Martin grinned coolly in Dierich's face.

"However," added the latter, "to content the burgomaster, we will search the house."

Martin turned grave directly.

This change of countenance did not escape Dierich. He reflected a moment.

"Watch outside, two of you, one on each side of the house, that no one jump from the upper windows. The rest come with me."

And he took the candle and mounted the stairs, followed by three of his comrades.

Martin was left alone.

The stout soldier hung his head. All had gone so well at first: and now this fatal turn! Suddenly it occurred to him that all was not yet lost. Gerard must be either in Peter's room or Margaret's; they were not so very high from the ground. Gerard would leap out. Dierich had left a man below; but what then? For half a minute Gerard and he would be two to one, and in that brief space, what might not be done?

Martin then held the back door ajar and watched. The light shone in Peter's room. "Curse the fool!" said he, "is he going to let them take him like a girl?"



The light now passed into Margaret's bedroom. Still ready to take life and lose it. Desperate game! to win which was exile instant and for life, and to lose it was to die that moment upon that floor he stood on.

Dierich Brower and his men found Peter in his first sleep. They opened his cupboards; they ran their knives into an alligator he had nailed to his wall; they looked under his bed: it was a large room, and apparently full of hiding-places, but they found no Gerard.

Then they went on to Margaret's room, and the very sight of it was discouraging—it was small and bare, and not a cupboard in it; there was, however, a large fireplace and chimney. Dierich's eye fell on these directly. Here they found the beauty of Sevenbergen sleeping on an old chest, not a foot high, and no attempt made to cover it; but the sheets were snowy white, and so was Margaret's own linen. And there she lay, looking like a lily fallen into a rut.

Presently she awoke, and sat up in the bed, like one amazed; then, seeing the men, began to scream faintly, and pray for mercy.

She made Dierich Brower ashamed of his errand.

"Here is a to-do," said he, a little confused. "We are not going to hurt you, my pretty maid. Lie you still, and shut your eyes, and think of your wedding-night, while I look up this chimney to see if Master Gerard is there."

"Gerard! in my room?"

"Why not? They say that you and he——"

"Cruel! you know they have driven him away from me—driven him from his native place. This is a blind. You are thieves; you are wicked men; you are not men of Sevenbergen, or you would know Margaret Brandt better than to look for her lover in this room of all others in the world. Oh, brave! Four great hulking men to come,

armed to the teeth, to insult one poor honest girl! The women that live in your own houses must be naught, or you would respect them too much to insult a girl of good character."

"There! come away, before we hear worse," said Dierich hastily. "He is not in the chimney. Plaster will mend what a cudgel breaks; but a woman's tongue is a double-edged dagger, and a girl is a woman with her mother's milk still in her." And he beat a hasty retreat. "I told the burgomaster how 'twould be."

## CHAPTER XI

WHERE is the woman that cannot act a part? Where is she who will not do it, and do it well, to save the man she loves? Nature on these great occasions comes to the aid of the simplest of the sex, and teaches her to throw dust in Solomon's eyes. The men had no sooner retired than Margaret stepped out of bed, and opened the long chest on which she had been lying down in her skirt and petticoat and stockings, and night-dress over all; and put the lid, bed-clothes and all, against the wall: then glided to the door and listened. The footsteps died away through her father's room and down the stairs.

Now in that chest there was a peculiarity that it was almost impossible for a stranger to detect. A part of the boarding of the room had been broken, and Gerard had applied to make it look neater, and being short of money, had ingeniously sawed away a space sufficient to admit Margaret's *soi-disant* bed, and with the aid of his knife thus acquired he had repaired the whole room. To see the men bed or chest, it really rested on the rafters and boards. Consequently, it was full two feet higher than the rest of the room, and looked scarce one.

He caught him in.

All was quiet. Margaret kneeled and gave thanks to Heaven. Then she glided from the door and leaned over the chest, and whispered tenderly, "Gerard!"

Gerard did not reply.

She then whispered, a little louder, "Gerard, all is safe, thank Heaven! You may rise; but oh! be cautious!"

Gerard made no reply.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder—"Gerard!"

No reply.

"Oh, what is this?" she cried, and her hands ran wildly over his face and his bosom. She took him by the shoulders; she shook him; she lifted him; but he escaped from her trembling hands, and fell back, not like a man, but like a body. A great dread fell on her. The lid had been down. She had lain upon it. The men had been some time in the room. With all the strength of frenzy she tore him out of the chest. She bore him in her arms to the window. She dashed the window open. The sweet air came in. She laid him in it and in the moonlight. His face was the colour of ashes; his body was all limp and motionless. She felt his heart. Horror! it was as still as the rest! Horror of horrors! she had stifled him with her own body.

The mind cannot all at once believe so great and sudden strange a calamity. Gerard, who had got alive into

the chest scarce five minutes ago, how could he be

"Why

"Cruel! He had him by all the endearing names that heart—driven him or tongue could frame. She kissed him, and are thieves; and coaxed him, and implored him to speak Sevenbergen, o

than to look for words of love, such as she had never world. Oh, brave he, nor thought she could utter. Then

the poor creature, trembling all over, began to say over that ashy face little foolish things that were at once terrible and pitiable.

"Oh, Gerard! I am very sorry you are dead. I am very sorry I have killed you. Forgive me for not letting the men take you; it would have been better than this. Oh, Gerard! I am very, very sorry for what I have done." Then she began suddenly to rave. "No! no! such things can't be, or there is no God. It is monstrous. How can my Gerard be dead? How can I have killed my Gerard? I love him. Oh, God! you know how I love him. He does not. I never told him. If he knew my heart, he would speak to me, he would not be so deaf to his poor Margaret. It is all a trick to make me cry out and betray him: but no! I love him too well for that. I'll choke first." And she seized her own throat, to check her wild desire to scream in her terror and anguish.

"If he would but say one word. Oh, Gerard! don't die without a word. Have mercy on me and scold me, but speak to me: if you are angry with me, scold me! curse me! I deserve it: the idiot that killed the man she loved better than herself. Ah! I am a murderess. The worst in all the world. Help! help! I have murdered him. Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!"

She tore her hair, and uttered shriek after shriek, so wild, so piercing, they fell like a knell upon the ears of Dierich Brower and his men. All started to their feet, and looked at one another.

Martin Wittenhaagen, standing at the foot of the stairs with his arrow drawn nearly to the head and his knife behind him, was struck with amazement to see the men come back without Gerard: he lowered his bow, and looked open-mouthed at them. They, for their part, were equally puzzled at the attitude they had caught him in.

"Why, mates, was the old fellow making ready to shoot at us?"

"Stuff!" said Martin, recovering his stolid composure; "I was but trying my new string. There! I'll unstring my bow, if you think that."

"Humph!" said Dierich suspiciously, "there is something more in you than I understand: put a log on, and let us dry our hides a bit ere we go."

A blazing fire was soon made, and the men gathered round it, and their clothes and long hair were soon smoking from the cheerful blaze. Then it was that the shrieks were heard in Margaret's room. They all started up, and one of them seized the candle, and ran up the steps that led to the bedrooms.

Martin rose hastily too, and being confused by these sudden screams, and apprehending danger from the man's curiosity, tried to prevent him from going there.

At this Dierich threw his arms round him from behind, and called on the others to keep him. The man that had the candle got clear away, and all the rest fell upon Martin; and after a long and fierce struggle, in the course of which they were more than once all rolling on the floor, with Martin in the middle, they succeeded in mastering the old Samson, and binding him hand and foot with a rope they had brought for Gerard.

Martin groaned aloud. He saw the man had made his way to Margaret's room during the struggle, and here was he powerless.

"Ay, grind your teeth, you old rogue," said Dierich, panting with the struggle. "You shan't use them."

"It is my belief, mates, that our lives were scarce safe while this old fellow's bones were free."

"He makes me think this Gerard is not far off," put in another.

"No such luck," replied Dierich. "Hollo, mates. Jorian Ketel is a long time in that girl's bedroom. Best go and see after him, some of us."

The rude laugh caused by this remark had hardly subsided, when hasty footsteps were heard running along overhead.

"Oh, here he comes, at last. Well, Jorian, what is to do now up there?"

## CHAPTER XII

JORIAN KETEL went straight to Margaret's room, and there, to his infinite surprise, he found the man he had been, in search of, pale and motionless, his head in Margaret's lap, and she kneeling over him, mute now, and stricken to stone. Her eyes were dilated yet glazed, and she neither saw the light nor heard the man, nor cared for anything on earth, but the white face in her lap.

Jorian stood awestruck, the candle shaking in his hand.

• "Why, where was he, then, all the time?"

Margaret heeded him not. Jorian went to the empty chest and inspected it. He began to comprehend. The girl's dumb and frozen despair moved him.

"This is a sorry sight," said he; "it is a black night's work: all for a few skins! Better have gone with us than so. She is past answering me, poor wench. Stop! let us try whether——"

He took down a little round mirror, no bigger than his hand, and put it to Gerard's mouth and nostrils, and held it there. When he withdrew it, it was dull.

"THERE IS LIFE IN HIM!" said Jorian Ketel to himself.

Margaret caught the words instantly, though only muttered, and it was as if a statue should start into life and passion. She rose, and flung her arms round Jorian's neck.



"Oh, bless the tongue that tells me so!" and she clasped the great rough fellow again and again, eagerly, almost fiercely.

"There, there! let us lay him warm," said Jorian; and in a moment he raised Gerard and laid him on the bed-clothes. Then he took out a flask he carried, and filled his hand twice with Schiedamze, and flung it sharply each time in Gerard's face. The pungent liquor co-operated with his recovery—he gave a faint sigh.

When Jorian returned his off-hand way disarmed all suspicion. And soon after the party agreed that the kitchen of the Three Kings was much warmer than Peter's house, and they departed, having first untied Martin.

"Take note, mates, that I was right, and the burgo-master wrong," said Dierich Brower, at the door; "I said we should be too late to catch him, and we were too late."

Thus Gerard, in one terrible night, grazed the prison and the grave.

And how did he get clear at last? Not by his cunningly contrived hiding-place, nor by Margaret's ready wit; but by a good impulse in one of his captors, by the bit of humanity left in a somewhat reckless fellow's heart, aided by his desire of gain. So mixed and seemingly incongruous are human motives, so shortsighted our shrewdest counsels.

*When the storm abated Ghysbrecht rode over to Sevenbergen to see what his men were doing. He found them sleeping in the tavern of the Seven Kings—and Peter's house empty.*

*Furious, he awakened the men and set off in hot pursuit. He came upon the fugitives in the forest. In front of his men Ghysbrecht tried to ride down Gerard—but he did not succeed, for Gerard struck him with all his might with his oaken staff and laid him on the ground. Then the three fled into the*

*thicknesses of the wood by paths known to Martin. When they ventured to rest, to their surprise Ghysbrecht's purse was entangled to the chains of Gerard's wallet.*

*"Throw it away," said Margaret.*

*"Lawful spoil," said the old soldier.*

*"Heaven has given it by miracle," Gerard said.*

*"Take your way," Margaret said humbly. "You are my husband—is it for me to gainsay you?"*

*Their conversation ceased, for they heard the sound of a hound's mellow voice—they were being tracked by blood-hounds.*

Then Margaret did a sly thing. She stepped behind Gerard, and furtively drew the knife across her arm, and made it bleed freely; then stooping, smeared her hose and shoes; and still as the blood trickled she smeared them; but so adroitly that neither Gerard nor Martin saw.

*Then she laid her hand on Gerard's shoulder, and bid him climb a high ash-tree near. He did as she said, and barely was in safety when with a yell the great hound sprang at Gerard's tree. The next moment it was dead from an arrow shot by Martin's unerring aim. The next moment another hound shared the same fate. Hiding in the coppice, they saw Van Ghysbrecht on his mule, his head bandaged. Before Martin could string his bow, Gerard flung himself on Ghysbrecht from behind and he rolled to the ground. Then placing Margaret on the mule, they soon out-distanced the soldiers. When they felt they were fairly safe, they stopped, and then Gerard perceived the wound on Margaret's arm, and was touched beyond words at her devotion. Margaret wept; they all knew that Gerard must leave them to save his life.*

"And I must part from her," he sobbed; "we two that love so dear—one must be in Holland, one in Italy. Ah me! ah me! ah me!"

At this Margaret wept afresh, but patiently and silently.

Instinct is never off its guard, and with her unselfishness was an instinct. To utter her present thoughts would be to add to Gerard's misery at parting, so she wept in silence.

Suddenly they emerged upon a beaten path, and Martin stopped.

"This is the bridle-road I spoke of," said he, hanging his head; "and there away lies the hostelry."

Margaret and Gerard cast a scared look at one another.

"Come a step with me, Martin," whispered Gerard. When he had drawn him aside, he said to him in a broken voice: "Good Martin, watch over her for me! She is my wife; yet I leave her. See, Martin! here is gold—it was for my journey; it is no use my asking her to take it—she would not; but you will for her, will you not? Oh, Heaven! and is this all I can do for her? Money? But poverty is a curse. You will not let her want for anything, dear Martin? The burgomaster's silver is enough for me."

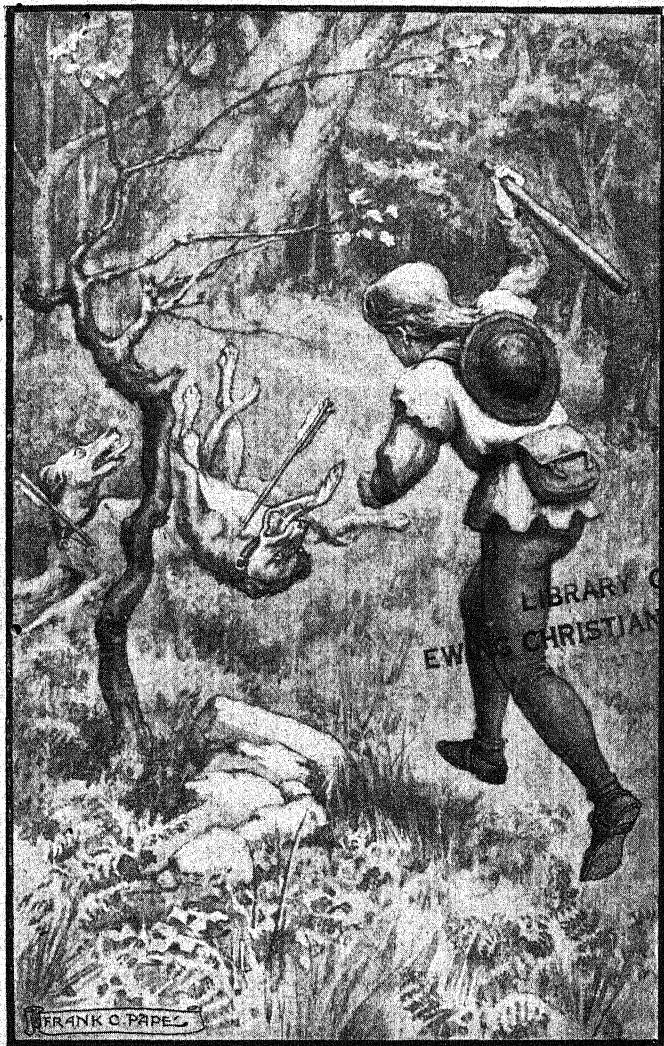
"Thou art a good lad, Gerard. Neither want nor harm shall come to her. I care more for her little finger than for all the world; and were she nought to me, even for thy sake would I be a father to her. Go with a stout heart, and God be with thee going and coming." And the rough soldier wrung Gerard's hand, and turned his head away, with unwonted feeling.

After a moment's silence he was for going back to Margaret; but Gerard stopped him. "No, good Martin; prithee, stay here behind this thicket, and turn your head away from us, while I—oh, Martin! Martin! say farewell."

She did not shed one tear, nor speak one word.

At the edge of the wood, he took her off the mule, and bade her go across to her father's house. She did as she was bid.

Martin to Rotterdam. Sevenbergen was too hot for him.



"THE NEXT MOMENT ANOTHER HOUND SHARED THE SAME FATE."



## CHAPTER XIII

*SAD days followed for Margaret. Her father noticed the deep-drawn sigh and the unbidden tear, but she never failed in any dutiful service.*

*Elias and Catherine kept away from her, a slight she felt keenly.*

*Ghysbrecht also was a changed man; always tyrannical, he now became moody and irritable—with good reason too, for not only had Gerard escaped his toils, but parchments had gone. A dread lay on him—were those parchments to be found by others, a guilty secret might be revealed.*

*At last Margaret's strength failed, and a fever attacked her. How she would have fared it is hard to say but for the goodness of Margaret Van Eyck and her trusty maid Reicht, who comforted her with nourishing dishes and kind words.*

*Martin Wittenhaagen was not an old soldier for nothing. He went at once to Rotterdam, found his way to the Duke out hunting, and obtained from him a pardon in writing for himself and Gerard—an important matter; for striking a burgomaster and killing blood-hounds were no slight crimes in those days. He then was able to return to Sevenbergen, much to the content of Margaret.*

*With joy did she show the pardon to Margaret Van Eyck, who decided that Gerard must be informed. An old friend of hers, Hans Memling, was going to Italy; he should convey a letter to him. So she bid Margaret hasten and write, for Memling was going to sup with her shortly. All was done, the letter duly written and delivered to the painter.*

*But evil minds were plotting.*

*Cornelis and Sybrandt plotted with the burgomaster to change the letter given to Memling for another letter purporting to come from Margaret Van Eyck announcing Margaret Brandt's death.*



*They had hoped to have changed the letters while Memling was drinking, but failed. Then they attacked Memling on the road and accomplished their purpose. Ghysbrecht had more reasons for keeping Gerard away than he cared to disclose, for he had found out from Margaret that he had taken away in his bosom the parchment deed between Ghysbrecht and her grandfather, Floris Brandt. That truly would tell a tale.*

#### CHAPTER XIV

A CHANGE came over Margaret Brandt. She went about her household duties like one in a dream. If Peter did but speak a little quickly to her, she started and fixed two terrified eyes on him. She went less often to her friend Margaret Van Eyck, and was ill at her ease when there. Instead of meeting her warm old friend's caresses, she used to receive them passive and trembling, and sometimes almost shrink from them. But the most extraordinary thing was, she never would go outside her own house in daylight. When she went to Tergou it was after dusk, and she returned before daybreak. She would not even go to matins. At last Peter, unobservant as he was, noticed it, and asked her the reason.

"The folk all look at me so."

One day, Margaret Van Eyck asked her what was the matter. A scared look and a flood of tears was all the reply; the old lady expostulated gently.

"What, sweetheart, afraid to confide your sorrows to me?"

"I have no sorrows, madame, but of my own making. I am kinder treated than I deserve; especially in this house."

"Then why not come oftener, my dear?"

"I come oftener than I deserve;" and she sighed deeply.

"There, Reicht is bawling for you," said Margaret Van Eyck; "go, child—what on earth can it be?"

Turning possibilities over in her mind, she thought Margaret must be mortified at the contempt with which she was treated by Gerard's family.

"I will take them to task for it, at least such of them as are women;" and the very next day she put on her hood and cloak, and, followed by Reicht, went to the hosier's house.

Catherine received her with much respect, and thanked her with tears for her kindness to Gerard. But when, encouraged by this, her visitor diverged to Margaret Brandt, Catherine's eyes dried, and her lips turned to half the size, and she looked as only obstinate, ignorant women can look.

When they put on this cast of features, you might as well attempt to soften or convince a brick wall. Margaret Van Eyck tried, but all in vain. So then, not being herself used to be thwarted, she got provoked, and at last went out hastily with an abrupt and mutilated curtsy, which Catherine returned with an air rather of defiance than obeisance.

Outside the door Margaret Van Eyck found Reicht conversing with a pale girl on crutches. Margaret Van Eyck was pushing by them with heightened colour, and a scornful toss intended for the whole family, when suddenly a little delicate hand glided timidly into hers, and looking round she saw two dove-like eyes, with the water in them, that sought hers gratefully and at the same time imploringly. The old lady read this wonderful look, complex as it was, and down went her choler. She stopped and kissed Kate's brow.

"I see," said she. "Mind, then, I leave it to you."

About a month after this a soldier of the Dalgetty tribe, returning from service in Burgundy, brought a letter one evening to the hosier's house. He was away on business;

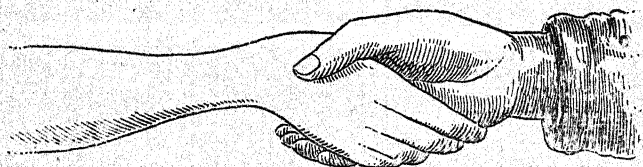
but the rest of the family sat at supper. The soldier laid the letter on the table by Catherine, and, refusing all guerdon for bringing it, went off to Sevenbergen.

The latter was unfolded and spread out; and curiously enough, though not one of them could read, they could all tell it was Gerard's handwriting.

"And your father must be away," cried Catherine. "Are ye not ashamed of yourselves? not one that can read your brother's letter."

But although the words were to them what hieroglyphics are to us, there was something in the letter they could read. There is an art can speak without words; unfettered by the penman's limits, it can steal through the eye into the heart and brain, alike of the learned and unlearned; and it can cross a frontier or a sea, yet lose nothing. It is at the mercy of no translator; for it writes a universal language.

When, therefore, they saw this,



which Gerard had drawn with his pencil between the two short paragraphs, of which his letter consisted, they read it, and it went straight to their hearts.

Gerard was bidding them farewell.

As they gazed on that simple sketch, in every turn and line of which they recognised his manner, Gerard seemed present, and bidding them farewell.

The women wept over it till they could see it no longer.

Giles said, "Poor Gerard!" in a lower voice than seemed to belong to him.

Even Cornelis and Sybrandt felt a momentary remorse, and sat silent and gloomy.

But how to get the words read to them. They were loth to show their ignorance and their emotion to a stranger.

"The Dame Van Eyck?" said Kate timidly.

"And so I will, Kate. She has a good heart. She loves Gerard, too. She will be glad to hear of him. I was short with her when she came here; but I will make my submission, and then she will tell me what my poor child says to me."

She was soon at Margaret Van Eyck's house.

There was a young woman in the room seated pensively by the stove; but she rose and courteously made way for the visitor.

"Now, what think you brings me here, young lady? It is a letter! a letter from my poor boy that is far away in some savage part or other. And I take shame to say that none of us can read it. I wonder whether you can read?"

"Yes."

"Can ye, now? It is much to your credit, my dear. I daresay she won't be long; but every minute is an hour to a poor longing mother."

"I will read it to you."

"Bless you, my dear; bless you!"

In her unfeigned eagerness she never noticed the suppressed eagerness with which the hand was slowly put out to take the letter. She did not see the tremor with which the fingers closed on it.

"Come, then, read it to me, prithee. I am wearying for it."

"The first words are, 'To my honoured parents.'"

"Ay! and he always did honour us, poor soul."

"God and the saints have you in His holy keeping, and

bless you by night and by day. Your one harsh deed is forgotten; your years of love remembered.'"

Catherine laid her hand on her bosom, and sank back in her chair with one long sob.

"Then comes this, madam. It doth speak for itself: 'a long farewell.'"

"Ay, go on; bless you, girl; you give me sorry comfort. Still 'tis comfort."

"To my brothers Cornelis and Sybrandt—Be content; you will see me no more!"

"What does that mean? Ah!"

"To my sister Kate. Little angel of my father's house. Be kind to *her*——' Ah!"

"That is Margaret Brandt, my dear—his sweetheart, poor soul. I've not been kind to her, my dear. Forgive me, Gerard!"

"—for poor Gerard's sake; since grief to her is death—to—me——' Ah!" And nature, resenting the poor girl's struggle for unnatural composure, suddenly gave way, and she sank from her chair and lay insensible, with the letter in her hand, and her head on Catherine's knees.

When she had recovered Catherine started to return home. Little Kate met her outside the town. When they reached the house they found a soldier seated tranquilly by their fire. The moment they entered the door he rose, and saluted them civilly. They stood and looked at him; Kate with some little surprise, but Catherine with a great deal, and with rising indignation.

"What makes you here?" was Catherine's greeting.

"I came to seek after Margaret."

"Well, we know no such person."

"Say not so, dame; sure you know her by name—Margaret Brandt."

"We have heard of her for that matter—to our cost."

"Come, dame, prithee tell me at least where she bides."

"I know not where she bides, and care not."

Denys felt sure this was a deliberate untruth. He bit his lip.

"Well, I looked to find myself in an enemy's country at this Tergou; but maybe if ye knew all ye would not be so dour."

"I do know all," replied Catherine bitterly. "This morn I knew nought."

"Hath not Gerard written?" asked the soldier.

"Now hush!" said Eli, "let none speak but I. Young man," said he solemnly, "in God's name who are you, that know us though we know you not, and that shake our hearts speaking to us of—the absent—our poor rebellious son: whom Heaven forgive and bless?"

"What, master," said Denys, lowering his voice, "hath he not writ to you? hath he not told you of me, Denys of Burgundy?"

"He hath writ, but three lines, and named not Denys of Burgundy, nor any stranger."

"Ay, I mind the long letter was to his sweetheart, this Margaret, and she has decamped, plague take her, and how I am to find her Heaven knows."

"What, is she not your sweetheart then?"

"Who, dame? an't please you."

"Why, Margaret Brandt."

"How can my comrade's sweetheart be mine? I know her not from Noah's niece; how should I? I never saw her."

"Whist with this idle chat, Kate," said Eli impatiently, "and let the young man answer me. How came you to know Gerard, our son? Prithee now think on a parent's cares, and answer me straightforward, like a soldier as thou art."

"And shall. I was paid off at Flushing, and started for



Burgundy. On the German frontier I lay at the same inn with Gerard. I fancied him. I said, 'Be my comrade.' He was loth at first; consented presently. Many a weary league we trode together. Never were truer comrades: never will be while earth shall last. First I left my route a bit to be with him: then he his to be with me. We talked of Sevenbergen and Tergou a thousand times; and of all in this house. We had our troubles on the road; but battling them together made them light. I saved his life from a bear; he mine in the Rhine: for he swims like a duck and I like a hod o' bricks; and one another's lives at an inn in Burgundy, where we two held a room for a good hour against seven cut-throats, and crippled one and slew two; and your son did his devoir like a man, and met the stoutest champion I ever encountered, and spitted him like a sucking-pig. Else I had not been here. But just when all was fair, and I was to see him safe aboard ship for Rome, if not to Rome itself, met us the Lord Anthony of Burgundy, and his men, making for Flanders, then in insurrection, tore us by force apart, took me where I got some broad pieces in hand, and a broad arrow in my shoulder, and left my poor Gerard lonesome. At that sad parting, soldier though I be, these eyes did rain salt scalding tears, and so did his, poor soul. His last word to me was, 'Go, comfort Margaret!' so here I be. Mine to him was, 'Think no more of Rome. Make for Rhine, and down stream home.' Now say, for you know best, did I advise him well or ill?"

"Soldier, take my hand," said Eli. "God bless thee! God bless thee!" and his lip quivered.

Catherine then casting a piercing glance all round the little circle, laid the letter flat on the table. She repeated every word of it by memory, following the lines with her finger, to cheat herself and hearers into the notion that

she could read the words, or nearly. Then, suddenly lifting her head, she cast another keen look on Cornelis and Sybrandt ; their eyes fell.

On this the storm that had long been brewing burst on their heads.

Catherine seemed to swell like an angry hen ruffling her feathers, and out of her mouth came a Rhone and Saône of wisdom and twaddle, of great and mean invective, such as no male that ever was born could utter in one current ; and not many women.

The following is a fair though a small sample of her words : only they were uttered all in one breath :—

“I have long had my doubts that you blew the flame betwixt Gerard and your father, and set that old rogue, Ghysbrecht, on. And now, here are Gerard’s own written words to prove it. You have driven your own flesh and blood into a far land, and robbed the mother that bore you of her darling, the pride of her eye, the joy of her heart. But you are all of a piece from end to end. When you were all boys together, my others were a comfort ; but you were a curse : mischievous and sly ; and took a woman half a day to keep your clothes whole : for why ? work wears cloth, but play cuts it. With the beard comes prudence ; but none came to you : still the last to go to bed, and the last to leave it ; and why ? because honesty goes to bed early, and industry rises betimes ; where there are two lie-abeds in a house there are a pair of ne’er-do-weels. Often I’ve sat and looked at your ways, and wondered where ye came from : ye don’t take after your father, and ye are no more like me than a wasp is to an ant ; sure ye were changed in the cradle, or the cuckoo dropped ye on my floor : for ye have not our hands, nor our hearts : of all my blood, none but you ever jeered them that God afflicted ; but often when my back was turned I’ve heard you mock

at Giles, because he is not so big as some; and at my lily Kate, because she is not so strong as a Flanders mare. After that rob a church an you will! for you can be no worse in His eyes that made both Kate and Giles, and in mine that suffered for them, poor darlings, as I did for you, you paltry, unfeeling, treasonable curs! No, I will not hush, my daughter, they have filled the cup too full. It takes a deal to turn a mother's heart against the sons she has nursed upon her knees; and many is the time I have winked and wouldn't see too much, and bitten my tongue, lest their father should know them as I do; he would have put them to the door that moment. But now they have filled the cup too full. And where got ye all this money? For this last month ye have been rolling in it. You never wrought for it. I wish I may never hear from other mouths how ye got it. It is since that night you were out so late, and *your* head came back so swelled, Cornelis. Sloth and greed are ill-mated, my masters. Lovers of money must sweat or steal. Well, if you robbed any poor soul of it, it was some woman, I'll go bail; for a ryan would drive you with his naked hand. No matter, it is good for one thing. It has shown me how you will guide our gear if ever it comes to be yourn. I have watched you, my lads, this while. You have spent a groat to-day between you. And I spend scarce a groat a week, and keep you all, good *and* bad. No! give up waiting for the shoes that will maybe walk behind your coffin; for this shop and this house shall never be yourn. Gerard is our heir; poor Gerard, whom you have banished and done your best to kill; after that never call me mother again! But you have made him tenfold dearer to me. My poor lost boy! I shall soon see him again; shall hold him in my arms, and set him on my knees. Ay, you may stare! You are too crafty, and yet not crafty enow. You

cut the stalk away; but you left the seed—the seed that shall outgrow you, and outlive you. Margaret Brandt is quick, and it is Gerard's, and what is Gerard's is mine; and I have prayed the saints it may be a boy; and it will—it must. Kate, when I found it was so, my bowels yearned over her child unborn as if it had been my own. He is our heir. He will outlive us. You will not; for a bad heart in a carcass is like the worm in a nut, soon brings the body to dust. So, Kate, take down Gerard's bib and tucker that are in the drawer you wot of, and one of these days we will carry them to Sevenbergen. We will borrow Peter Buyskens' cart, and go comfort Gerard's wife under her burden. She is his wife."

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## CHAPTER XV

*CATHERINE now was anxious to go to Margaret, but Elias objected and forbade her. At last one day she protested to Kate that a wife was not a slave, and made her way to Sevenbergen, only to find that Margaret and her father had gone, and left no trace behind them. She returned with a heavy heart. Another trouble was in store for her: The Duke demanded Giles the dwarf son; such deformities were prized about courts. Catherine would gladly have kept her son, but the Duke was too powerful for his wishes to be disregarded, and also Giles himself elected to go.*

*When Denys heard that Margaret could not be found at Sevenbergen, he started to find her.*

His plan, like all great things, was simple. He should go to a hundred towns and villages, and ask in each after an old physician with a fair daughter, and an old long-bow soldier. He should inquire of the burgomasters about all newcomers, and should go to the fountains and watch the

women and girls as they came with their pitchers for water.

And away he went, and was months and months on the tramp, and could not find her.

And so we leave him on the tramp, "Pilgrim of Friendship," as his poor comrade was of Love.

*Margaret and her father went to Rotterdam and lodged over a tailor's shop in the Bredekirk Straet. Her marriage lines being in Gerard's possession, she had not the courage to face the curious questions that she was sure to meet from her old neighbours. In Rotterdam she worked hard, using her father's fame as a physician to doctor sick folk. He, poor man, was paralysed and could do nothing—but this work for her was too full of danger. She was seized by constables and questioned by the burgomaster, by his side a row of real physicians, who accused her of practising unlawfully. The burgomaster had pity on her youth and beauty, and as she promised not to offend again, dismissed her, only exacting a fine.*

*Then, still resolute, she thought what she could do to support the home, her sick father, Martin Wittenhaagen, and herself, for her little store was getting low. It ended in her undertaking the fine laundry work, in which she was an expert. Martin cast pride to the winds and helped her with heart and hand; but he too did her an injury.*

*Treated too kindly at a house where he carried the linen, he babbled Margaret's story—Deserted by her lover!*

*This was caught hold of by the girls at the fountain, who spared her no taunt nor affront. She was no match for such tongues, and took all they said silently.*

*One day a soldier was at the well talking to the girls. It was Denys, the soldier who had brought Gerard's letter! Denys of Burgundy!*

"Tell me my name," said she quickly.

"Margaret Brandt."

"Gerard? Where is he? Is he in life? Is he well? Is he coming? Is he come? Why is he not here? Where have ye left him? Oh, tell me! prithee, prithee, prithee, tell me!"

"Ay, ay, but not here. Oh, ye are all curiosity now, mesdames, eh? Lass, I have been three months a-foot travelling all Holland to find ye, and here you are. Oh, be joyful!" and he flung his cap in the air, and seizing both her hands, kissed them ardently. "Ay, my pretty she-comrade, I have found thee at last. I knew I should. Shall be flouted no more.—I'll twist your necks at the first word, ye little trollops.—And I have got fifteen gold angels left for thee, and our Gerard will soon be here. Shalt wet thy purple eyes no more."

But the fair eyes were wet even now, looking kindly and gratefully at the friend that had dropped among her foes as if from heaven; Gerard's comrade.

"Prithee come home with me, good, kind Denys. I cannot speak of him before these."

They went off together, followed by a chorus.

"She has gotten a man. She has gotten a man at last. Hoo! hoo! hoo!"

Margaret quickened her steps; but Denys took down his cross-bow and pretended to shoot them all dead: they fled quadrivious, shrieking.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE reader already knows how much these two had to tell one another. It was a sweet yet bitter day for Margaret, since it brought her a true friend and ill news: for now first she learned that Gerard was all alone in that strange land. She could not think with Denys that he would come home; indeed he would have arrived before this.



The two soldiers helped her to the best of their powers in her laundry work, proud to be of use. One day, to Margaret's surprise, Ghysbrecht appeared.

"Ah," cried Margaret. Then swiftly turned her back on him and hid her face with invincible repugnance. "Oh, that man! that man!"

"Nay, fear me not," said Ghysbrecht; "I come on a friend's errand. I bring ye a letter from foreign parts."

"Mock me not, old man," and she turned slowly round.

"Nay, see;" and he held out an enormous letter.

Margaret darted on it, and held it with trembling hands and glistening eyes. It was Gerard's handwriting.

"Oh, thank you, sir, bless you for this. I forgive you all the ill you ever wrought me."

And she pressed the letter to her bosom with one hand, and glided swiftly from the room with it.

As she did not come back, Ghysbrecht went away, but not without a scowl at Martin. Margaret was hours alone with her letter.

When she came down again she was a changed woman. Her eyes were wet, but calm, and all her bitterness and excitement charmed away.

"Denys," said she softly, "I have got my orders. I am to read my lover's letter to his folk."

"Ye will never do that?"

"Ay will I."

"I see there is something in the letter has softened ye towards them."

"Not a jot, Denys, not a jot. But an I hated them like poison I would not disobey my love. Denys, 'tis so sweet to obey, and sweetest of all to obey one who is far, far away, and cannot enforce my duty, but must trust my love for my obedience. Ah, Gerard, my darling, at hand I might have slighted thy commands, misliking thy folk as I

have cause to do: but now, didst bid me go into the raging sea and read thy sweet letter to the sharks, there I'd go. Therefore, Denys, tell his mother I have got a letter, and if she and hers would hear it, I am their servant; let them say their hour, and I'll seat them as best I can, and welcome them as best I may."

Denys went off to Catherine with this good news. He found the family at dinner, and told them there was a long letter from Gerard.

"Well," said Catherine, "but methinks 'tis for her to come to us, not we to her."

"Alas, mother! what odds does that make?"

"Much," said Eli. "Tell her we are over many to come to her, and bid her hither, the sooner the better."

When Denys was gone, Eli owned it was a bitter pill to him.

"When that lass shall cross my threshold, all the mischief and misery she hath made here will seem to come in adoors in one heap. But what could I do, wife? We *must* hear the news of Gerard. I saw that in thine eyes, and felt it in my own heart. And she is backed by our undutiful but still beloved son, and so is she stronger than we, and brings our noses down to the grindstone, the sly, cruel jade. But never heed. We will hear the letter; and then let her go unblessed, as she came unwelcome."

"Make your mind easy," said Catherine. "She will not come at all." And a tone of regret was visible.

Shortly after Richart, who had been hourly expected, arrived from Amsterdam grave and dignified in his burgher's robe and gold chain, ruff, and furred cap, and was received, not with affection only, but respect; for he had risen a step higher than his parents, and such steps were marked in mediæval society almost as visibly as those in their staircases.

Admitted in due course to the family council, he showed plainly, though not discourteously, that his pride was deeply wounded by their having deigned to treat with Margaret Brandt.

"I see the temptation," said he. "But which of us hath not at times to wish one way and do another?"

This threw a considerable chill over the old people.

So little Kate put in a word.

"Vex not thyself, dear Richart. Mother says she will not come."

"All the better, sweetheart. I fear me, if she do, I shall hie me back to Amsterdam."

Here Denys popped his head in at the door, and said—

"She will be here at three on the great dial."

They all looked at one another in silence.

Margaret made her toilet in the same spirit that a knight of her day dressed for battle—he to parry blows, and she to parry glances—glances of contempt at her poverty, or of irony at her extravagance. Her kirtle was of English cloth, dark blue, and her farthingale and hose of the same material, but a glossy roan, or claret colour. Not an inch of pretentious fur about her, but plain, snowy linen wristbands, and curiously plaited linen from the bosom of the kirtle up to the commencement of the throat; it did not encircle her throat, but framed it, being square, not round. Her front hair still peeped in two waves much after the fashion which Mary Queen of Scots revived a century later; but instead of the silver net, which would have ill become her present condition, the rest of her head was covered with a very small tight-fitting hood of dark blue cloth, hemmed with silver. Her shoes were red; but the roan petticoat and hose prepared the spectator's mind for the shock, and they set off the arched instep and shapely foot.

Beauty knew its business then as now.

And with all this she kept her enemies waiting, though it was three by the dial.

At last Denys came alone, and whispered, "The she-comrade is without."

"Fetch her in," said Eli. "Now whisht, all of ye. None speak to her but I."

They all turned their eyes to the door in dead silence.

A little muttering was heard outside; Denys' rough organ and a woman's soft and mellow voice.

Presently that stopped; and then the door opened slowly, and Margaret Brandt, dressed as I have described, and somewhat pale, but calm and lovely, stood on the threshold, looking straight before her.

They all rose but Kate, and remained mute and staring.

"Be seated, mistress," said Eli gravely, and motioned to a seat that had been set apart for her.

She inclined her head, and crossed the apartment; and in so doing her condition was very visible, not only in her shape, but in her languor.

• Cornelis and Sybrandt hated her for it. Richart thought it spoiled her beauty.

It softened the woman somewhat.

She took her letter out of her bosom, and kissed it as if she had been alone; then disposed herself to read it, with the air of one who knew she was there for that single purpose.

But, as she began, she noticed they had seated her all by herself, like a leper. She looked at Denys, and putting her hand down by her side, made him a swift furtive motion to come by her.

He went with an obedient start as if she had cried "March!" and stood at her shoulder, like a sentinel; but this zealous manner of doing it revealed to the company that he had been ordered thither; and at that she coloured.

## CHAPTER XVII

*The Letter*

AND now she began to read her Gerard, their Gerard, to their eager ears, in a mellow but clear voice, so soft, so earnest, so thrilling, her very soul seemed to cling about each precious sound. It was a voice as of a woman's bosom set speaking by Heaven itself.

"I do nothing doubt, my Margaret, that long ere this shall meet thy beloved eyes, Denys, my most dear friend, will have sought thee out, and told thee the manner of our unlooked-for and most tearful parting. Therefore I will e'en begin at that most doleful day. What befel him after, poor faithful soul, fain, fain would I hear, but may not. But I pray for him day and night next after thee, dearest. Friend more staunch and loving had not David in Jonathan, than I in him. Be good to him, for poor Gerard's sake."

At these words, which came quite unexpectedly to him, Denys leaned his head on Margaret's high chair, and groaned aloud.

She turned quickly as she sat, and found his hand, and pressed it.

And so the sweetheart and the friend held hands while the sweetheart read.

Margaret continued—

"But oh! how I missed my Denys at every step! often I sat down on the road and groaned. And in the afternoon it chanced that I did so set me down where two roads met, and with heavy head in hand, and heavy heart, did think of thee, my poor sweetheart, and of my lost friend, and of the little house at Tergou, where they all loved me once; though now it has turned to hate."

*Catherine.* "Alas! that he will think so."

*Eli.* "Whisht, wife!"

"And I did sigh loud, and often. And me sighing so, one came carolling like a bird adown t'other road. 'Ay, chirp and chirp,' cried I bitterly. 'Thou hast not lost sweetheart, and friend, thy father's hearth, thy mother's smile, and every penny in the world.' And at last he did so carol, and carol, I jumped up in ire to get away from his most jarring mirth. But ere I fled from it, I looked down the path to see what could make a man so light-hearted in this weary world; and lo! the songster was a humpbacked cripple, with a bloody bandage o'er his eye, and both legs gone at the knee."

"He! he! he! he! he!" went Sybrandt, laughing and cackling.

Margaret's eyes flashed: she began to fold the letter up.

"Nay, lass," said Eli, "heed him not! Thou unmannerly cur, offer't but again and I put thee to the door."

"Why, what was there to gibe at, Sybrandt?" remonstrated Catherine more mildly. "Is not our Kate afflicted? and is she not the most content of us all, and singeth like a merle at times between her pains? But I am as bad as thou; prithee read on, lass, and stop our gabble with somewhat worth the hearkening."

"Then," said I, "may this thing be?" And I took myself to task: "Gerard, son of Eli, dost thou well to bemoan thy lot, that hast youth and health; and here comes the wreck of nature on crutches, praising God's goodness with singing like a mavis?"

*Catherine.* "There you see."

*Eli.* "Whisht, dame, whisht!"

"And whenever he saw me, he left carolling and presently hobbled up and chanted, 'Charity, for love of Heaven, sweet master, charity,' with a whine as piteous



as wind at keyhole. 'Alack, poor soul,' said I, 'charity is in my heart, but not my purse; I am poor as thou.' Then he believed me none, and to melt me undid his sleeve, and showed a sore wound on his arm, and said he, 'Poor cripple though I be, I am like to lose this eye to boot, look else.' I saw and groaned for him, and to excuse myself let him wot how I had been robbed of my last copper. Thereat he left whining all in a moment, and said, in a big manly voice, 'Then I'll e'en take a rest. Here, youngster, pull thou this strap: nay, fear not!' I pulled, and down came a stout pair of legs out of his back; and half his hump had melted away, and the wound in his eye no deeper than the bandage."

"Oh!" ejaculated Margaret's hearers in a body.

"Whereat, seeing me astounded, he laughed in my face, and told me I was not worth gulling, and offered me his protection. 'My face was prophetic,' he said. 'Of what?' said I. 'Marry,' said he, 'that its owner will starve in this thievish land.' Travel teaches e'en the young wisdom. Time was I had turned and fled this impostor as a pestilence; but now I listened patiently to pick up crumbs of counsel. And well I did: for nature and his adventurous life had crammed the poor knave with shrewdness and knowledge of the homelier sort—a child was I beside him. When he had turned me inside out, said he, 'Didst well to leave France and make for Germany; but think not of Holland again. Nay, on to Augsburg and Nürnberg, the Paradise of craftsmen: thence to Venice, an thou wilt. But thou wilt never bide in Italy nor any other land, having once tasted the great German cities. Why, there is but one honest country in Europe, and that is Germany; and since thou art honest, and since I am a vagabone, Germany was made for us twain.' I bade him make that good: how might one country fit true men and knaves!

'Why, thou novice,' said he, 'because in an honest land are fewer knaves to bite the honest man, and many honest men for the knave to bite.' I was in luck, being honest, to have fallen in with a friendly sharp. 'Be my pal,' said he; 'I go to Nurnberg; we will reach it with full pouches. I'll learn ye the *cul de bois*, and the *cul de jatte*, and how to maund, and chaunt, and patter, and to raise swellings, and paint sores and ulcers on thy body would take in the divell.' I told him, shivering, I'd liever die than shame myself and my folk so."

Eli. "Good lad! good lad!"

"Then I told him I would go with him, but on my own terms. I would paint, and write, and sing to make money on the road, but never would I be a disgrace to my worthy father and mother.

"So we strangely consorted companions wandered from town to town. I sometimes painting sign boards at inns, again painting playing cards—it needs not to tell whose likeness I drew for the Queen of Diamonds. Then I learned the folk tunes from *Cul de Jatte*, and sang them to his psaltery with words of my own composition. I would not use unworthy words, and the country people gave willingly for the sake of the sweet songs. But trouble came, *Cul de Jatte* was taken by the constables at Nurnberg and condemned to prison for a month—a fine—and then to be whipt out of the town.

"So I could no longer travel with him. I found out where he was imprisoned, and threw up to the prison window the price of the psaltery. Honestly *Cul de Jatte* only took his due, and bade me God-speed, saying had the folk in the world been more like me, he would not now be in this present plight.

"Now I knew how to use the psaltery and brush, so I started my way with courage. All went well. At Augsburg I met a merchant who engaged me as a scrivener to travel with him to Venice. This provided for all my expenses, no light matter.

*Besides we had armed soldiers with us, so we need fear no thieves by the way."*

\* \* \* \* \*

*"My master affecteth me much; he is sad for the loss of a dear daughter, and loveth holy harmonies on my psaltery—one evening, weary of being shut up in the litter, and also of the slow pace, I dismounted and went forward, but as bad fortune had it, at two roads I took the wrong one; as soon as I perceived this I retraced my steps, and took shelter in a mill. This was the haunt of thieves and freebooters, and it is a marvel I escaped with my life. It is too long to tell you the events of my terrible night there. It ended in my getting away but wounded. To tell truth I swooned away, and when I came to myself I was seated in the litter, and my good merchant holding of my hand. I babbled I know not what, and then shuddered awhile in silence. He put a horn of wine to my lips."*

*Catherine. "Bless him! bless him!"*

*Eli. "Whisht!"*

*"And I told him what had befallen. He would see my leg. It was sprained sore, and swelled at the ankle; and all my points were broken, as I could scarce keep up my hose, and I said—*

*"Sir, I shall be but a burden to you, I doubt, and can make you no harmony now; my poor psaltery it is broken; and I did grieve over my broken music, companion of so many weary leagues.*

*"But he patted me on the cheek, and bade me not fret; also he did put up my leg on a pillow, and tended me like a kind father."*

*Then Margaret held out the letter to Eli, and said faintly but sweetly, "I will trust it from my hand now. In sooth, I am little fit to read any more—and—and—lo'th to leave my comfort;" and she wreathed her other arm round Catherine's neck.*

"Read thou, Richart," said Eli: "thine eyes be younger than mine."

Richart took the letter. "Well," said he, "such writing saw I never. A writeth with a needle's point; and clear to boot. Why is he not in my counting-house at Amsterdam instead of vagabonding it out yonder!"

*Catherine.* "Bless him! bless him!"

*Eli.* "Whisht!"

"*January 19.*—I sit all day in the litter, for we are pushing forward with haste, and at night the good, kind merchant sendeth me to bed, and will not let me work. Strange! whene'er I fall in with men like fiends, then the next moment God still sendeth me some good man or woman, lest I should turn away from human kind.

"Oh, Margaret! how strangely mixed they be, and how old I am by what I was three months agone! And lo! if good Master Fugger hath not been and bought me a psaltery."

*Catherine.* "Eli, my man, an yon merchant comes our way let us buy a hundred ells of cloth of him, and not higgle."

"*Venice, January 26.*—Sweetheart, I must be brief, and tell thee but a part of that I have seen, for this day my journal ends. To-night it sails for thee, and I, unhappy, not with it, but to-morrow, in another ship, to Rome.

"Dear Margaret, I took a hand-litter, and was carried to St. Mark his church. Outside it, towards the market-place, is a noble gallery, and above it four famous horses cut in brass by the ancient Romans, and seem all moving, and at the very next step must needs leap down on the beholder. About the church are six hundred pillars of marble, porphyry, and ophites. Inside is a treasure greater than either at St. Denys, or Loretto, or Toledo. Here a jewelled pitcher given the seigniory by a Persian king, also

the ducal cup blazing with jewels, and on its crown a diamond and a chrysolite, each as big as an almond; two golden crowns and twelve golden stomachers studded with jewels, from Constantinople; item, a monstrous sapphire; item, a great diamond given by a French king; item, a prodigious carbuncle.

"And after this they took me to the quay, and presently I espied among the masts one garlanded with amaranth flowers. 'Take me thither,' said I, and I let my guide know the custom of our Dutch skippers to hoist flowers to the masthead when they are courting a maid. Oft had I scoffed at this saying, 'So then his wooing is the earth's concern.' But now, so far from the Rotter, that bunch at a masthead made my heart leap with assurance of a countryman. They carried me, and oh, Margaret! on the stern of that Dutch hoy, was writ in muckle letters—

#### RICHART ELIASSEN, AMSTERDAM.

'Put me down,' I said; 'for our Lady's sake put me down.'

"I sat on the bank and looked, scarce believing my eyes, and looked, and presently fell to crying, till I could see the words no more. Ah me, how they went to my heart, those bare letters in a foreign land.

"Dear Richart! good, kind brother Richart! often I have sat on his knee and rid on his back. Kisses many he has given me, unkind word from him had I never. And there was his name on his own ship, and his face and all his grave, but good and gentle ways, came back to me, and I sobbed vehemently, and cried aloud, 'Why, why is not brother Richart here, and not his name only?'

"I spake in Dutch, for my heart was too full to hold their foreign tongues, and——"

*Eli.* "Well, Richart, go on, lad, prithee go on. Is this a place to halt at?"

*Richart.* "Father, with my duty to you, it is easy to say go on, but think ye I am not flesh and blood? The poor boy's—simple grief and brotherly love coming—so sudden—on me, they go through my heart and—I cannot go on; sink me if I can even see the words, 'tis writ so fine."

*Denys.* "Courage, good Master Richart! Take your time. Here are more eyne wet than yours. Ah, little comrade! would God thou wert here, and I at Venice for thee."

*Richart.* "Poor little curly-headed lad, what had he done that we have driven him so far?"

"That is what I would fain know," said Catherine drily, then fell to weeping and rocking herself, with her apron over her head.

"Kind dame, good friends," said Margaret, trembling, "let me tell you how the letter ends. The skipper, hearing our Gerard speak his grief in Dutch, accosted him, and spake comfortably to him; and after a while our Gerard found breath to say he was worthy Master Richart's brother. Thereat was the good skipper all agog to serve him."

*Richart.* "So! so! skipper! Master Richart aforesaid will be at thy wedding and bring's purse to boot."

*Margaret.* "Sir, he told Gerard of his consort that was to sail that very night for Rotterdam; and dear Gerard had to go home and finish his letter and bring it to the ship. And the rest, it is but his poor, dear words of love to me, the which, an't please you, I think shame to hear them read aloud, and ends with the lines I sent to Mistress Kate, and *they* would sound so harsh *now* and ungrateful."

The pleading tone, as much as the words, prevailed, and Richart said he would read no more aloud, but run his eye over it for his own brotherly satisfaction. She blushed and looked uneasy, but made no reply.



"Eli," said Catherine, still sobbing a little, "tell me, for our Lady's sake, how our poor boy is to live at that nasty Rome. He is gone there to write, but here be his own words to prove writing avails nought: a had died o' hunger by the way but for paint-brush and psaltery. Well-a-day!"

"Well," said Eli, "he has got brush and music still. Besides, so many men so many minds. Writing, thof it had no sale in other parts, may be merchandise at Rome."

"Father," said little Kate, "have I your good leave to put in my word 'twixt mother and you?"

"And welcome, little heart."

"Then, seems to me, painting and music, close at hand, be stronger than writing, but being distant, nought to compare; for see what glamour written paper hath done here but now. Our Gerard, writing at Venice, hath verily put his hand into this room at Rotterdam, and turned all our hearts. Ay, dear, dear Gerard, methinks thy spirit hath rid hither on these thy paper wings; and oh! dear father, why not do as we should do were he here in the body?"

"Kate," said Eli, "fear not; Richart and I will give him glamour for glamour. We will write him a letter, and send it to Rome by a sure hand with money, and bid him home on the instant."

Cornelis and Sybrandt exchanged a gloomy look.

"Ah, good father! And meantime?"

"Well, meantime?"

"Dear father, dear mother, what can we do to pleasure the absent, but be kind to his poor lass; and her own trouble afore her?"

"'Tis well!" said Eli; "but I am older than thou."

Then he turned gravely to Margaret—

"Wilt answer me a question, my pretty mistress?"

"If I may, sir," faltered Margaret.

"What are these marriage lines Gerard speaks of in the letter?"

"Our marriage lines, sir. His and mine. Know you not that we are betrothed?"

"Before witnesses?"

"Ay, sure. My poor father and Martin Wittenhaagen."

"This is the first I ever heard of it. How came they in his hands? They should be in yours."

"Alas, sir, the more is my grief; but I ne'er doubted him; and he said it was a comfort to him to have them in his bosom."

"Y'are a very foolish lass."

"Indeed I was, sir. But trouble teaches the simple."

"'Tis a good answer. Well, foolish or no, y'are honest. I had shown ye more respect at first, but I thought y'had been his leman, and that is the truth."

"God forbid, sir! Denys, methinks 'tis time for us to go. Give me my letter, sir!"

"Bide ye! bide ye! be not so hot for a word! Natheless, wife, methinks her red cheek becomes her."

"Better than it did you to give it her, my man."

"Softly, wife, softly. I am not counted an unjust man thof I be somewhat slow."

Here Richart broke in.

"Why, mistress, did ye shed your blood for our Gerard?"

"Not I, sir. But maybe I would."

"Nay, nay. But he says you did. Speak sooth now!"

"Alas! I know not what ye mean. I rede ye believe not all that my poor lad says of me. Love makes him blind."

"Traitor!" cried Denys. "Let not her throw dust in thine eyes, Master Richart. Old Martin tells me—ye need not make signals to me, she-comrade; I am as blind as love. Martin tells me she cut her arm, and let her blood

flow, and smeared her heels when Gerard was hunted by the bloodhounds, to turn the scent from her lad."

"Well, and if I did, 'twas my own, and spilled for the good of my own," said Margaret defiantly. But Catherine suddenly clasping her, she began to cry at having found a bosom to cry on, of one who would have also shed her blood for Gerard in his danger.

"Wife," said he solemnly, "you will set another chair at our table for every meal: also another plate and knife. They will be for Margaret and Peter. She will come when she likes, and stay away when she pleases. None may take her place at my left hand. Such as can welcome her are welcome to me. Such as cannot, I force them not to bide with me. The world is wide and free. Within my walls I am master, and my son's betrothed is welcome."

"Get him home on the instant," roared Giles. "I'll make a man of him. I can do aught with the Duke."

"Hear the boy!" said Catherine, half comically, half proudly.

"We hear him," said Richart; "a mostly makes himself heard when a do speak."

*Sybrandt.* "Which will get to him first?"

*Cornelis* (gloomily). "Who can tell?"

## CHAPTER XVIII

ABOUT two months before this scene in Eli's home, the natives of a little maritime place between Naples and Rome might be seen flocking to the sea beach, with eyes cast seaward at a ship that laboured against a stiff gale blowing dead on the shore.

The mariners stumbled wildly about the deck, handling

the ropes as each thought fit, and cursing and praying alternately.

The passengers were huddled together round the mast, some sitting, some kneeling, some lying prostrate, and grasping the bulwarks as the vessel rolled and pitched in the mighty waves. One comely young man, whose ashy cheek, but compressed lips, showed how hard terror was battling in him with self-respect, stood a little apart, holding tight by a shroud, and wincing at each sea. It was the ill-fated Gerard.

A Roman woman of the humbler class sat with her child at her half-bared breast, silent amid that wailing throng; her cheek ashy pale; her eye calm; and her lips moved at times in silent prayer, but she neither wept, nor lamented, nor bargained with the gods. Whenever the ship seemed really gone under their feet, and bearded men squeaked, she kissed her child; but that was all. And so she sat patient, and suckled him in death's jaws; for why should he lose any joy she could give him; *moribundo*? Ay, there, I do believe, sat Antiquity among those mediævals. Sixteen hundred years had not tainted the old Roman blood in her veins; and the instinct of a race she had perhaps scarce heard of taught her to die with decent dignity.

A gigantic friar stood on the poop with feet apart, like the Colossus of Rhodes, not so much defying, as ignoring, the peril that surrounded him. He recited verses from the Canticles with a loud, unwavering voice; and invited the passengers to confess to him. Some did so on their knees, and he heard them, and laid his hands on them, and absolved them as if he had been in a snug sacristy, instead of a perishing ship. Gerard got nearer and nearer to him, by the instinct that takes the wavering to the side of the impregnable. And, in truth, the courage of heroes facing fleshly odds might have paled by the side of that gigantic

friar, and his still more gigantic composure. Thus, even here, two were found who maintained the dignity of our race: a woman, tender, yet heroic, and a monk steeled by religion against mortal fears.

The captain left the helm and came amidships pale as death.

"Lighten her," he cried. "Fling all overboard, or we shall founder ere we strike, and lose the one little chance we have of life."

"See, there is a church in sight. Steer for that church, mate, and you, friends, pray to the saint, who'er he be."

So they steered for the church and prayed to the unknown god it was named after. A tremendous sea pooped them, broke the rudder, and jammed it immovable, and flooded the deck.

*All who could rushed to the boats. The poor woman and her child were never thought of. Gerard said:*

"Wife, I'll save thee yet, please God."

And he ran to find a cask or a plank to float her. There was none.

Then his eye fell on the wooden image of the Virgin. He caught it up in his arms, and, heedless of a wail that issued from its worshipper like a child robbed of its toy, ran aft with it.

"Come, wife," he cried. "I'll lash thee and the child to this. 'Tis sore worm-eaten, but 'twill serve."

She turned her great dark eye on him and said a single word—

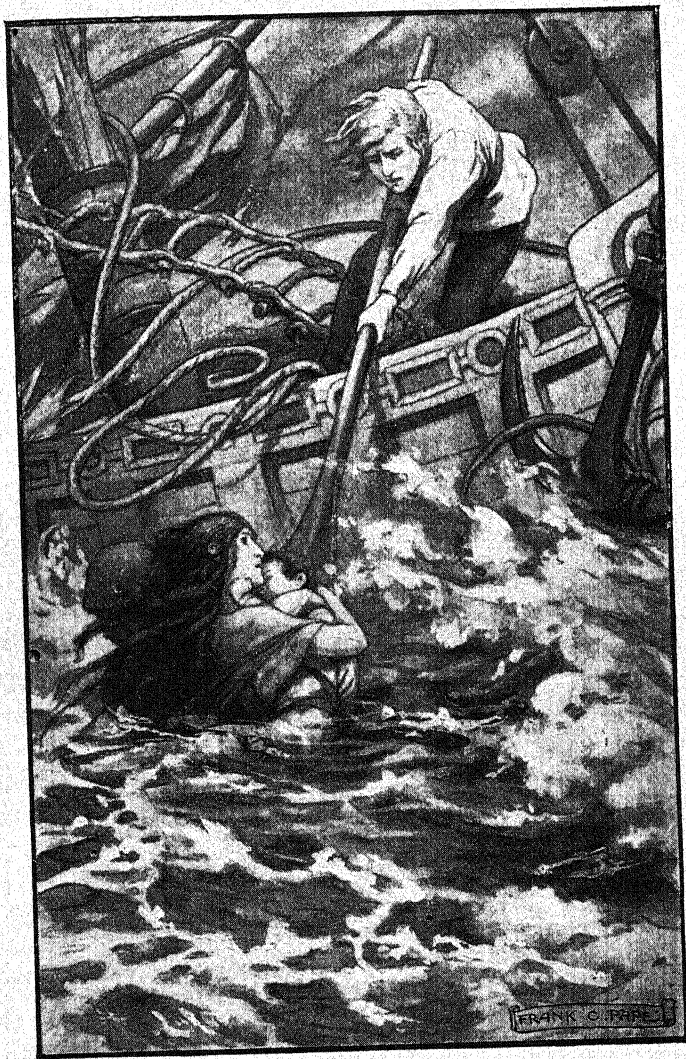
"Thyself?!"

But with wonderful magnanimity and tenderness.

"I am a man, and have no child to take care of."

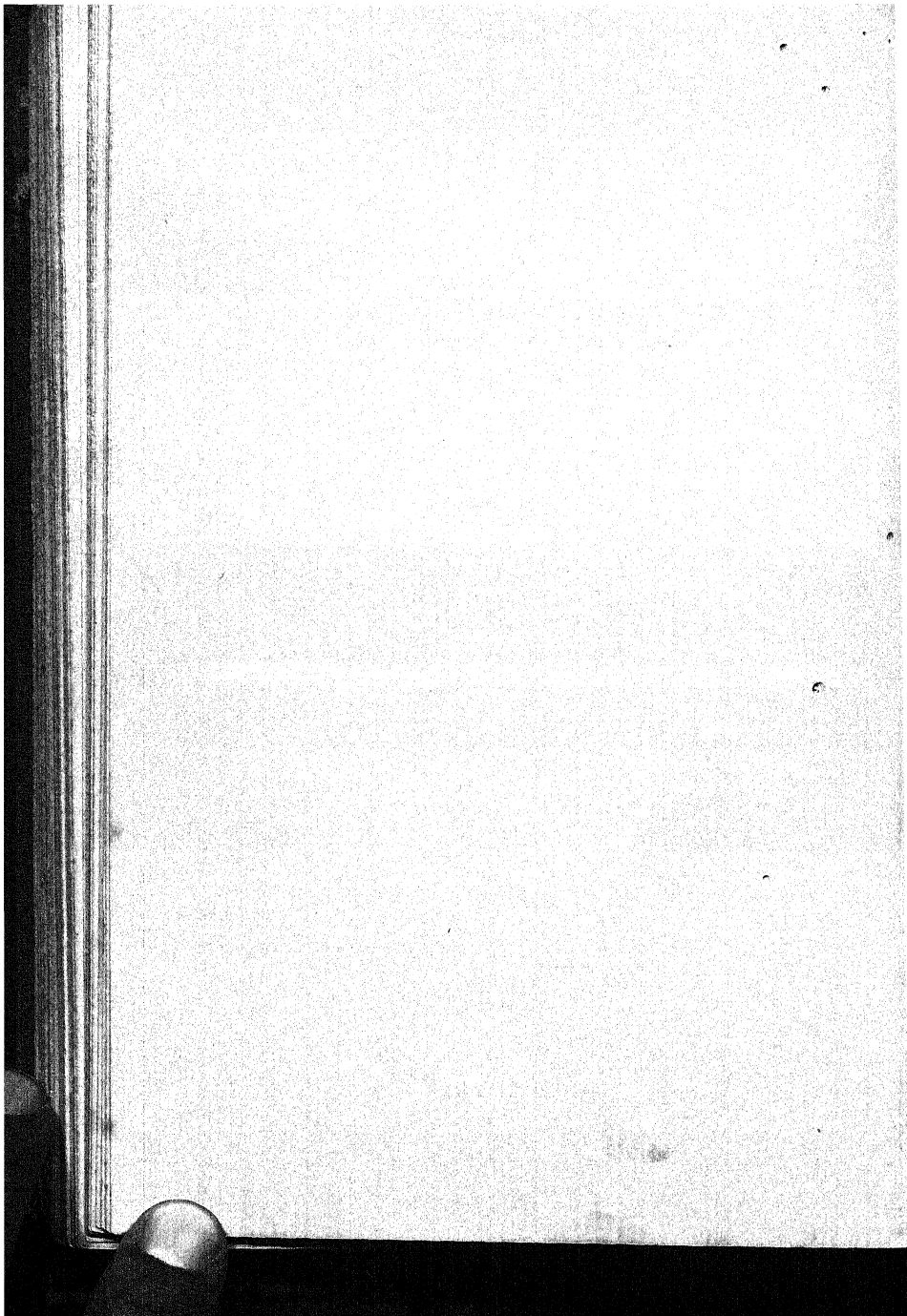
"Ah!" said she, and his words seemed to animate her face with a desire to live. He lashed the image to her side. Then with the hope of life she lost something of her heroic





GERARD SAVES THE ROMAN WOMAN AND HER CHILD.





calm—not much: her body trembled a little, but not her eye.

The ship was now so low in the water that by using an oar as a lever he could slide her into the waves.

“Come,” said he, “while yet there is time.”

She turned her great Roman eyes, wet now, upon him.

“Poor youth!—God forgive me!—My child!”

And he launched her on the surge, and with his oar kept her from being battered against the ship.

A heavy hand fell on him; a deep sonorous voice sounded in his ear: “’Tis well. Now come with me.”

It was the gigantic friar.

Gerard turned, and the friar took two strides, and laid hold of the broken mast. Gerard did the same, obeying him instinctively. Between them, after a prodigious effort, they hoisted up the remainder of the mast, and carried it off.

“Fling it in,” said the friar, “and follow it.”

They flung it in; but one of the bewildered passengers had run after them, and jumped first and got on one end. Gerard seized the other, the friar the middle.

It was a terrible situation. The mast rose and plunged with each wave like a kicking horse, and the spray flogged their faces mercilessly, and blinded them:

The friar uttered a short Latin prayer for the safety of his soul, and took his place composedly. They rolled along *ὑπὲρ Θανάτοιον*; one moment they saw nothing, and seemed down in a mere basin of watery hills: the next they caught glimpses of the shore speckled bright with people, who kept throwing up their arms with wild Italian gestures to encourage them, and the black boat driving bottom upwards, and between it and them the woman rising and falling like themselves. She had come across a paddle, and was holding her child tight with her left arm, and paddling gallantly with her right.

When they had tumbled along thus a long time, suddenly the friar said quietly—

“I touched the ground.”

“Impossible, father,” said Gerard; “we are more than a hundred yards from shore. Prithee, prithee, leave not our faithful mast.”

“My son,” said the friar, “you speak prudently. But know that I have business of Holy Church on hand, and may not waste time floating when I can walk, in her service. There, I felt it with my toes again; see the benefit of wearing sandals, and not shoon. Again; and sandy. Thy stature is less than mine: keep to the mast. I walk.”

The friar shook himself, bestowed a short paternal benediction on the natives, and went on to Rome, with eyes bent on earth according to his rule, and without pausing. He did not even cast a glance back upon that sea which had so nearly engulfed him, but had no power to harm him, without his Master's leave.

As Gerard stood by the sea, watching, with horror and curiosity mixed, his late companions washed ashore, a hand was laid lightly on his shoulder. He turned. It was the Roman matron, burning with womanly gratitude. She took his hand gently, and raising it slowly to her lips, kissed it; but so nobly, she seemed to be conferring an honour on one deserving hand. Then, with face all beaming and moist eyes, she held her child up and made him kiss his preserver.

Gerard kissed the child: more than once. He was fond of children. But he said nothing. He was much moved; for she did not speak at all, except with her eyes, and glowing cheeks, and noble antique gesture, so large and stately. Perhaps she was right. Gratitude is not a thing of words. It was an ancient Roman matron thanking a modern from her heart of hearts.

## CHAPTER XIX

*GERARD took a modest lodging on the west bank of the Tiber, but he would have fared ill had he not met Teresa, the woman whose life he had saved, with that of her child, on the ship. Her gratitude to him was deep and sincere.*

One day Gerard was walking with her when they passed a shop that sold vellum. There was a beautiful white skin in the window. Gerard looked at it wistfully; but he knew he could not pay for it; so he went on rather hastily. However, he soon made up his mind where to get vellum, and parting with Teresa at his own door, ran hastily upstairs, and took the bond he had brought all the way from Sevenbergen, and laid it with a sigh on the table. He then prepared with his chemicals to erase the old writing; but as this was his last chance of reading it, he now overcame his deadly repugnance to bad writing, and proceeded to decipher the deed in spite of its detestable contractions. It appeared by this deed that Ghysbrecht Van Swieten was to advance some money to Floris Brandt on a piece of land, and was to repay himself out of the rent.

On this Gerard felt it would be imprudent and improper to destroy the deed. On the contrary, he vowed to decipher every word, at his leisure. He went downstairs, determined to buy a small piece of vellum with his half of the card-money.

At the bottom of the stairs he found the landlady and Teresa talking. At sight of him the former cried—

"Here he is. You are caught, donna mia. See what she has bought you!"

And whipped out from under her apron the very skin of vellum Gerard had longed for.

"Why, dame! why, donna Teresa!" And he was speechless with pleasure and astonishment.

"Dear donna Teresa, there is not a skin in all Rome like it. However came you to hit on this one? 'Tis glamour."

"Alas, dear boy, did not thine eye rest on it with desire? and didst thou not sigh in turning away from it? And was it for Teresa to let thee want the thing after that?"

The next day in the afternoon he went, as Teresa advised, to Fra Colonna's lodgings. He announced his business, and fee'd Onesta the maid, and she took him up to the friar. Gerard entered with a beating heart. The room, a large one, was strewed and heaped with objects of art, antiquity, and learning, lying about in rich profusion and confusion. Manuscripts, pictures, carvings in wood and ivory, musical instruments; and in this glorious chaos sat the friar, poring intently over an Arabian manuscript.

He looked up a little peevishly at the interruption. Onesta whispered in his ear.

"Very well," said he. "Let him be seated. Stay; young man, show me how you write!" And he threw Gerard a piece of paper, and pointed to an inkhorn.

"So please you, reverend father," said Gerard, "my hand it trembleth too much at this moment; but last night I wrote a vellum page of Greek, and the Latin version by its side, to show the various character."

"Show it me!"

Gerard brought the work to him in fear and trembling; then stood, heart-sick, awaiting his verdict.

When it came it staggered him. For the verdict was a Dominican falling on his neck.

Fra Colonna was charmed with his new artist, and having the run of half the palaces in Rome, sounded his praises so, that he was soon called upon to resign him. He told Gerard what great princes wanted him.

"But I am so happy with you, father," objected Gerard.

"Fiddlestick about being happy with me," said Fra

Colonna; "you must not be happy; you must be a man of the world; the grand lesson I impress on the young is, be a man of the world. Now these Montesini can pay you three times as much as I can, and they shall too—by Jupiter."

And the friar clapped a terrific price on Gerard's pen. It was acceded to without a murmur. Much higher prices were going for *copying* than *authorship* ever obtained for centuries under the printing press.

Gerard had three hundred crowns for Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric.

The great are mighty sweet upon all their pets, while the fancy lasts; and in the rage for Greek MSS. the handsome writer soon became a pet, and nobles of both sexes caressed him like a lap dog.

But Gerard remained in his garret. To increase his expenses would have been to postpone his return to Margaret. Luxury had no charms for the single-hearted one, when opposed to love.

*Everything seemed to be promising well when Gerard had the misfortune to offend one of the princesses of the house of Colonna, whose likeness he was taking. Italian women are fierce in their vengeance, and merciless. Gerard knew his danger, and changed his lodging, sorry to leave the painter Vanucci, who had been a pleasant companion.*

He had little to do now, and no princess to draw, so he set himself resolutely to read that deed of Floris Brandt, from which he had hitherto been driven by the abominably bad writing. He mastered it, and saw at once that the loan on this land must have been paid over and over again by the rents, and that Ghysbrecht was keeping Peter Brandt out of his own.

"Fool! not to have read this before," he cried. He hired a horse and rode down to the nearest port. A vessel was to sail for Amsterdam in four days.



He took a passage; and paid a small sum to secure it.

"The land is too full of cut-throats for me," said he; "and 'tis lovely fair weather for the sea. Our Dutch skippers are not shipwrecked like these bungling Italians."

When he returned home there sat his old landlady with her eyes sparkling.

"You are in luck, my young master," said she. "All the fish run to your net this day methinks. See what a laquey hath brought to our house! This bill and this bag."

Gerard broke the seals, and found it full of silver crowns.

"Well," said she, "I trow nothing could make you happier."

"Nothing, except to be there."

"Well, that is a pity, for I thought to make you a little happier with a letter from Holland."

"A letter? for me? where? how? who brought it? Oh, dame!"

"A stranger; a painter, with a reddish face and an outlandish name; Anselmin, I trow."

"Hans Memling? a friend of mine. God bless him!"

"Ay, that is it; Anselmin. He could scarce speak a word, but a had the wit to name thee; and a puts the letter down, and a nods and smiles, and I nods and smiles, and gives him a pint o' wine, and it went down him like a spoonful."

"That is Hans, honest Hans."

Gerard threw his arm round her neck and hugged her.

"My best friend," said he, "my second mother, I'll read it to you."

"Ay, do, do."

"Alas! it is not from Margaret. This is not her hand." And he turned it about.

"Alack; but maybe her bill is within. The lasses are aye for gliding in their bills under cover of another hand."

"True. Whose hand is this? sure, I have seen it. I trow 'tis my dear friend the demoiselle Van Eyck. Oh, then Margaret's bill *will* be inside." He tore it open. "Nay, 'tis all in one writing. 'Gerard, my well beloved son' (she never called me that before that I mind), 'this letter brings thee heavy news from one would liever send thee joyful tidings. Know that Margaret Brandt died in these arms on Thursday sennight last.' (What does the doting old woman mean by that?) 'The last word on her lips was "Gerard": she said, 'Tell him I prayed for him at my last hour; and bid him pray for me.' She died very comfortable, and I saw her laid in the earth, for her father was useless, as you shall know. So no more at present from her that is with sorrowing heart thy loving friend and servant,

" 'MARGARET VAN EYCK.' "

The poor woman sighed and rocked herself.

"And must I be the one to bring it thee all smiling and smirking? I could kill myself for't. Death spares none," she sobbed. "Death spares none."

Gerard staggered against the window-sill.

"But He is master of death," he groaned. "My pretty Margaret; my sweet, my loving Margaret. The best daughter! the truest lover! the pride of Holland! the darling of the world! It is a lie. Where is this caitiff Hans? I'll hunt him round the town. I'll cram his murdering falsehood down his throat."

And he seized his hat and ran furiously about the streets for hours.

Towards sunset he came back white as a ghost. He had not found Memling; but his poor mind had had time to realize the woman's simple words, that Death spares none.

On the second day he was raving with fever on the brain. On a table hard by lay his rich auburn hair, long as a woman's.

The deadlier symptoms succeeded one another rapidly.

On the fifth day his leech retired and gave him up.

On the sunset of that same day he fell into a deep sleep.

Some said he would wake only to die.

But an old gossip, whose opinion carried weight (she had been a professional nurse), declared that his youth might save him yet, could he sleep twelve hours.

When he had been forty-eight hours asleep, it got wind, and they had much ado to keep the curious out. But they admitted only Fra Colonna and his friend the gigantic Fra Jerome.

These two relieved the women, and sat silent; the former eyeing his young friend with tears in his eyes, the latter, with beads in his hand, looked as calmly on him as he had on the sea when Gerard and he encountered it hand to hand.

At last, I think it was about the sixtieth hour of this strange sleep, the landlady touched Fra Colonna with her elbow. He looked. Gerard had opened his eyes as gently as if he had been but dozing.

He stared.

He drew himself up a little in bed.

He put his hand to his head, and found his hair was gone.

He noticed his friend Colonna, and smiled with pleasure. The good, simple father then hurried away; for he was overcome by his emotion.

Fra Jerome remained behind.

"Young man," said he, "the Church alone gives repose to the heart on earth, and happiness to the soul hereafter. Hath earth deceived thee, hath passion broken thy heart

after tearing it, the Church opens her arms: consecrate thy gifts to her! The Church is peace of mind."

*Fra Jerome then left him.*

A dark cloud fell on a noble mind.

His pure and unrivalled love for Margaret had been his polar star. It was quenched, and he drifted on the gloomy sea of no hope.

He wandered alone. He drank wine alone to stupefy himself, and paralyse a moment the dark foes to man that preyed upon his soul. He wandered alone amidst the temples of Old Rome, and lay stony-eyed, woe-begone, among their ruins, worse wrecked than they.

## CHAPTER XX

Two nights after this Pietro Vanucci and Andrea, Vanucci's boy, sat waiting supper for Gerard.

The former grew peevish. It was past nine o'clock. At last he sent Andrea to Gerard's room on the desperate chance of his having come in unobserved. Andrea shrugged his shoulders and went.

He returned without Gerard, but with a slip of paper. Andrea could not read as scholars in his day and charity boys in ours understand the art; but he had a quick eye, and had learned how the words Pietro Vanucci looked on paper.

"That is for you, I trow," said he, proud of his intelligence.

Pietro snatched it, and read it to Andrea, with his satirical comments.

"Dear Pietro, dear Andrea, life is too great a burden."

"So 'tis, my lad; but that is no reason for being abroad at supper-time. Supper is not a burden."

" 'Wear my habits.'

" *Said the poplar to the juniper bush.*

" 'And thou, Andrea, mine amethyst ring; and me in both your hearts a month or two.'

" *Why, Andrea?*

"For my body, ere this ye read, it will lie in Tiber. Trouble not to look for it. 'Tis not worth the pains. Oh, unhappy day that it was born; oh, happy night that rids me of it.

" 'Adieu! adieu!

" 'The broken-hearted GERARD.' "

Gerard, then, after writing his brief adieu to Pietro and Andrea, had stolen down to the river at nightfall.

He had taken his measures with a dogged resolution not uncommon in those who are bent on self-destruction. He filled his pockets with all the silver and copper he possessed, that he might sink the surer; and, so provided, hurried to a part of the stream that he had seen was little frequented.

And, to his annoyance, he observed a single figure leaning against the corner of an alley. So he affected to stroll carelessly away; but returned to the spot.

Lo! the same figure emerged from a side street and loitered about.

"Can he be watching me? Can he know what I am here for?" thought Gerard. "Impossible."

He went briskly off, walked along a street or two, made a detour and came back.

The man had vanished. But lo! on Gerard looking all round, to make sure, there he was a few yards behind, apparently fastening his shoe.

Gerard saw he was watched, and at this moment observed in the moonlight a steel gauntlet in his sentinel's hand.

Then he knew it was an assassin.

And with a snarl of contempt he ran from him, and flung himself into the water.

"Margaret!"

At the heavy plunge of his body in the stream the bravo seemed to recover from a stupor. He ran to the bank, and with a strange cry the assassin plunged in after the self-destroyer.

What followed will be related by the assassin.

## CHAPTER XXI

*ONE fine evening just at sunset Margaret had a little face by her side, and Catherine bustling round. Tears were in Margaret's eyes.*

"Ay, mother, I am but a sorry, ungrateful wretch to weep. If only Gerard were here to see it. 'Tis strange; I bore him well enow to be away from me in my sorrow; but oh, it doth seem so hard he should not share my joy. Prithee, prithee, come to me, Gerard! dear, dear Gerard!" And she stretched out her feeble arms.

Catherine bustled about, but avoided Margaret's eyes; for she could not restrain her own tears at hearing her own absent child thus earnestly addressed.

Presently, turning round, she found Margaret looking at her with a singular expression.

"Heard you nought?"

"No, my lamb. What?"

"I did cry on Gerard, but now."

"Ay, ay, sure I heard that."

"Well, he answered me."

"Tush, girl; say not that."

"Mother, as sure as I lie here, with his boy by my side,



his voice came back to me, 'Margaret!' So. Yet methought 'twas not his *happy* voice. But that might be the distance. All voices go off sad like at a distance. Why art not happy, sweetheart? and I so happy this night? Mother, I seem never to have felt a pain or known a care." And her sweet eyes turned and gloated on the little face in silence.

That very night Gerard flung himself into the Tiber. And that very hour she heard him speak her name, he cried aloud in death's jaws and despair's—

"Margaret!"

Account for it those who can. I cannot.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the guest-chamber of a Dominican convent lay a single stranger, exhausted by successive and violent fits of nausea, which had at last subsided, leaving him almost as weak as Margaret lay that night in Holland.

A huge wood fire burned on the hearth, and beside it hung the patient's clothes.

A gigantic friar sat by his bedside, reading pious collects aloud from his breviary.

The patient at times eyed him, and seemed to listen; at others closed his eyes and moaned.

The monk kneeled down with his face touching the ground and prayed for him; then rose and bade him farewell. "Day breaks," said he; "I must prepare for matins."

"Good Father Jerome, before you go, how came I hither?"

"By the hand of Heaven. You flung away God's gift. He bestowed it on you again. Think on it! Hast tried the world, and found its gall. Now try the Church! The Church is peace. Pax vobiscum."

He was gone. Gerard lay back, meditating and wondering, till weak and wearied he fell into a doze.

When he awoke again he found a new nurse seated beside him. It was a layman, with an eye as small and restless as Friar Jerome's was calm and majestic.

The man inquired earnestly how he felt.

"Very, very weak. Where have I seen you before, messer?"

"None the worse for my gauntlet?" inquired the other, with considerable anxiety. "I was fain to strike you withal, or both you and I should be at the bottom of Tiber."

Gerard stared at him. "What, 'twas you saved me? How?"

"Well, signor, I was by the banks of Tiber on—on—an errand, no matter what. You came to me and begged hard for a dagger stroke. But ere I could oblige you, ay, even as you spoke to me, I knew you for the signor that saved my wife and child upon the sea."

"It is Teresa's husband. And an assassin? ! ! ?"

"At your service. Well, Ser Gerard, the next thing was, you flung yourself into Tiber, and bade me hold aloof."

"I remember that."

"Had it been any but you, believe me I had obeyed you, and not wagged a finger. Men are my foes. They may all hang on one rope, or drown in one river for me. But when thou, sinking in Tiber, didst cry 'Margaret!'"

"Ah!"

"My heart it cried 'Teresa!' How could I go home and look her in the face, did I let thee die, and by the very death thou savedst her from? So in I went; and, luckily for us both, I swim like a duck. You, seeing me near, and being bent on destruction, tried to grip me, and so on us

both. But I swam round thee, and (receive my excuses) so buffeted thee on the nape of the neck with my steel glove that thou lost sense, and I with much ado, the stream being strong, did draw thy body to land, but insensible and full of water. Then I took thee on my back and made for my own home. 'Teresa will nurse him, and be pleased with me,' thought I. But hard by this monastery a holy friar, the biggest e'er I saw, met us and asked the matter. So I told him. He looked hard at thee. 'I know the face,' quoth he. 'Tis one Gerard, a fair youth from Holland.' 'The same,' quo' I. Then said his reverence, 'He hath friends among our brethren. Leave him with us! Charity, it is our office.'

"Also he told me they of the convent had better means to tend thee than I had. And that was true enow. So I just bargained to be let in to see thee once a day, and here thou art."

And the miscreant cast a strange look of affection and interest upon Gerard.

Gerard did not respond to it. He felt as if a snake were in the room. He closed his eyes.

"Ah, thou wouldst sleep," said the miscreant eagerly. "I go." And he retired on tiptoe with a promise to come every day.

Gerard lay with his eyes closed: not asleep, but deeply pondering.

Saved from death, by an assassin!

Was not this the finger of Heaven?

Of that Heaven he had insulted, cursed, and defied.

He tried to pray.

He found he could utter prayers. But he could not pray.

"I am doomed eternally," he cried, "doomed, doomed."

The organ of the convent church burst on his ear in rich and solemn harmony.

Then rose the voices of the choir chanting a full service.

Among them was one that seemed to hover above the others, and tower towards heaven; a sweet boy's voice, full, pure, angelic.

He closed his eyes and listened. The days of his own boyhood flowed back upon him in those sweet, pious harmonies. No earthly dross there, no foul, fierce passions, rending and corrupting the soul.

Peace, peace; sweet, balmy peace.

"Ay," he sighed, "the Church is peace of mind. Till I left her bosom I ne'er knew sorrow nor sin."

And the poor, torn, worn creature wept.

And even as he wept, there beamed on him the sweet and reverend face of one he had never thought to see again. It was the face of Father Anselm.

The good father had only reached the convent the night before last. Gerard recognised him in a moment, and cried to him—

"Oh, Father Anselm, you cured my wounded body in Juliers; now cure my hurt soul in Rome! Alas! you cannot."

Anselm sat down by the bedside and putting a gentle hand on his head, first calmed him with a soothing word or two.

He then (for he had learned how Gerard came there) spoke to him kindly but solemnly, and made him feel his crime, and urged him to repentance, and gratitude to that Divine Power which had thwarted his will to save his soul.

"Come, my son," said he, "first purge thy bosom of its load."

"Ah, father," said Gerard, "in Juliers I could; then I was innocent; but now, impious monster that I am, I dare not confess to you."

"Why not, my son? Thinkest thou I have not sinned against Heaven in my time, and deeply? oh, how deeply! Come, poor laden soul, pour forth thy grief, pour forth thy faults, hold back nought? Lie not oppressed and crushed by hidden sins."

And soon Gerard was at Father Anselm's knees confessing his every sin with sighs and groans of penitence.

"Thy sins are great," said Anselm. "Thy temptation also was great, terribly great. I must consult our good prior."

The good Anselm kissed his brow, and left him, to consult the superior as to his penance.

And lo! Gerard could pray now.

And he prayed with all his heart.

The phase through which this remarkable mind now passed, may be summed in a word—Penitence.

He turned with terror and aversion from the world, and begged passionately to remain in the convent. To him, convent nurtured, it was like a bird returning wounded, wearied, to its gentle nest.

He passed his novitiate in prayer, and mortification, and pious reading and meditation.

Upon a shorter probation than usual he was admitted to priest's orders.

And soon after took the monastic vows, and became a friar of St. Dominic.

Dying to the world, the monk parted with the very name by which he had lived in it, and so broke the last link of association with earthly feelings.

Here Gerard ended, and Brother Clement began.

The Dominicans, or preaching friars, once the most powerful order in Europe, were now on the wane; their rivals and bitter enemies, the Franciscans, were overpowering them throughout Europe; even in England, a

rich and religious country, where, under the name of the Black Friars, they had once been paramount.

Therefore the sagacious men, who watched and directed the interests of the order, were never so anxious to incorporate able and zealous sons and send them forth to win back the world.

The zeal and accomplishments of Clement, especially his rare mastery of language (for he spoke Latin, Italian, French, high and low Dutch), soon transpired, and he was destined to travel and preach in England, corresponding with the Roman centre.

But Jerome, who had the superior's ear, obstructed this design.

"Clement," said he, "has the milk of the world still in his veins, its feelings, its weaknesses; let not his new-born zeal and his humility tempt us to forego our ancient wisdom. Try him first, and temper him, lest one day we find ourselves leaning on a reed for a staff."

"It is well advised," said the prior. "Take him in hand thyself."

Then Jerome, following the ancient wisdom, took Clement and tried him.

*After many trials he reported :*

"Worthy Brother Anselm," said Jerome, "Clement is weak to the very bone. He will disappoint thee. He will do nothing *great*, either for the Church or for our holy order. Yet he is an orator, and hath drunken of the spirit of St. Dominic. Fly him, then, with a string."

That same day it was announced to Clement that he was to go to England immediately with Brother Jerome.

Clement folded his hands on his breast, and bowed his head in calm submission.



## CHAPTER XXII

WHEN little Gerard was nearly three months old, a messenger came hot from Tergou for Catherine.

"Now just you go back," said she, "and tell them I can't come, and I won't: they have got Kate." So he departed, and Catherine continued her sentence; "there, child, I *must* go: they are all at sixes and sevens: this is the third time of asking; and to-morrow my man would come himself and take me home by the ear, with a flea in't." She then recapitulated her experiences of infants, and instructed Margaret what to do in each coming emergency, and pressed money upon her. Margaret declined it with thanks. Catherine insisted, and turned angry. Margaret made excuses all so reasonable that Catherine rejected them with calm contempt; to her mind they lacked femininity. "Come, out with your heart," said she; "and you and me parting; and mayhap shall never see one another's face again."

"Oh! mother, say not so."

"Alack, girl, I have seen it so often; 'twill come into my mind now at each parting. When I was your age, I never had such a thought. Nay, we were all to live for ever then; so out wi' it."

"Well, then, mother—I would rather not have told you—your Cornelis must say to me, 'So you are come to share with us, eh, mistress?' those were his words. I told him I would be very sorry."

"Beshrew his ill tongue! What signifies it? He will never know."

"Most likely he would sooner or later. But whether or no, I will take no grudged bounty from any family; unless I saw my child starving, and then Heaven only

knows what I might do. Nay, mother, give me but thy love—I do prize that above silver, and they grudge me not that, by all I can find—for not a stiver of money will I take out of your house.”

“You are a foolish lass. Why, were it me, I’d take it just to spite him.”

“No, you would not. You and I are apples off one tree.”

Catherine yielded with a good grace; and when the actual parting came, embraces and tears burst forth on both sides.

When she was gone the child cried a good deal; and all attempts to pacify him failing, Margaret suspected a pin, and, searching between his clothes and his skin, found a gold angel incommoding his backbone.

“There, now, Gerard,” said she to the babe; “I *thought* granny gave in rather *sudden*.”

She took the coin and wrapped it in a piece of linen, and laid it at the bottom of her box, bidding the infant observe she could be at times as resolute as granny herself.

Catherine told Eli of Margaret’s foolish pride, and how she had baffled it. Eli said Margaret was right, and she was wrong. Catherine tossed her head. Eli pondered.

Margaret was not without domestic anxieties. She had still two men to feed, and could not work so hard as she had done. She had enough to do to keep the house, and the child, and cook for them all. But she had a little money laid by, and she used to tell her child his father would be home to help them before it was spent. And with these bright hopes, and that treasury of bliss, her boy, she spent some happy months.

Time wore on: and no Gerard came; and stranger still, no news of him.

Then her mind was disquieted, and, contrary to her nature, which was practical, she was often lost in sad

reverie; and sighed in silence. And, while her heart was troubled, her money was melting. And so it was, that one day she found the cupboard empty, and looked in her dependents' faces; and at the sight of them, her bosom was all pity; and she appealed to the baby whether she could let grandfather and poor old Martin want a meal; and went and took out Catherine's angel. As she unfolded the linen a tear of gentle mortification fell on it. She sent Martin out to change it. While he was gone a Frenchman came with one of the dealers in illuminated work, who had offered her so poor a price. He told her he was employed by his sovereign to collect masterpieces for her book of hours. Then she showed him the two best things she had; and he was charmed with one of them, viz., the flowers and raspberries and creeping things, which Margaret Van Eyck had shaded. He offered her an unheard-of price. "Nay, flout not my need, good stranger," said she; "three mouths there be in this house, and none to fill them but me."

Curious arithmetic! Left out No. 1.

"I flout thee not, fair mistress. My princess charged me strictly, 'Seek the best craftsmen; but I will no hard bargains; make them content with me, and me with them.'"

The next minute Margaret was on her knees kissing little Gerard in the cradle, and showering forth gold pieces on him again and again, and relating the whole occurrence to him in very broken Dutch.

"And oh, what a good princess: wasn't she? We will pray for her, won't we, my lambkin; when we are old enough?"

Martin came in furious. "They will not change it. I trow they think I stole it."

"I am beholden to thee," said Margaret hastily, and

almost snatched it from Martin, and wrapped it up again, and restored it to its hiding-place.

Ere these unexpected funds were spent, she got to her ironing and starching again. In the midst of which Martin sickened, and died after an illness of nine days.

Nearly all her money went to bury him decently.

He was gone; and there was an empty chair by her fireside. For he had preferred the hearth to the sun as soon as the Busybody was gone.

Margaret would not allow anybody to sit in this chair now. Yet whenever she let her eye dwell too long on it vacant, it was sure to cost her a tear.

And now there was nobody to carry her linen home. To do it herself she must leave little Gerard in charge of a neighbour. But she dared not trust such a treasure to mortal; and, besides, she could not bear him out of her sight for hours and hours. So she set inquiries on foot for a boy to carry her basket on Saturday and Monday.

A plump, fresh-coloured youth, called Luke Peterson, who looked fifteen, but was eighteen, came in, and blushing, and twiddling his bonnet, asked her if a man would not serve her turn as well as a boy.

With chubby-faced Luke's timely assistance, and the health and strength which Heaven gave this poor young woman to balance her many ills, the house went pretty smoothly awhile. But the heart became more and more troubled by Gerard's long and now most mysterious silence.

Whilst she was in this state, one day she heard a heavy step mount the stair. She started and trembled. "That is no step that I know. Ill tidings?"

The door opened, and an unexpected visitor, Eli, came in, looking grave and kind.

Margaret eyed him in silence, and with increasing agitation.

"Girl," said he, "the skipper is come back."

"One word," gasped Margaret; "is he alive?"

"Surely, I hope so. No one has seen him dead."

"Then they must have seen him alive."

"No, girl; neither dead nor alive hath he been seen this many months in Rome. My daughter Kate thinks he is gone to some other city. She bade me tell you her thought."

"Ay, like enough," said Margaret gloomily; "like enough. My poor babe!"

The old man in a faintish voice asked her for a morsel to eat: he had come fasting.

The poor thing pitied him with the surface of her agitated mind, and cooked a meal for him, trembling, and scarce knowing what she was about.

Ere he went he laid his hand upon her head, and said, "Be he alive, or be he dead, I look on thee as my daughter. Can I do nought for thee this day? bethink thee now."

"Ay, old man. Pray for him; and for me!"

Eli sighed, and went sadly and heavily down the stairs.

She listened half stupidly to his retiring footsteps till they ceased. Then she sank moaning down by the cradle, and drew little Gerard tight to her bosom. "Oh, my poor fatherless boy; my fatherless boy!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

CATHERINE gossiped with Joan, and learned that she was the wife of Jorian Ketel of Tergou, who had been servant to Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, but fallen out of favour, and come back to Rotterdam, his native place. His friends had got him the place of sexton to the parish, and what with that and carpentering, he did pretty well.



Catherine told Joan in return whose child it was she had nursed, and all about Margaret and Gerard, and the deep anxiety his silence had plunged them in. "Ay," said Joan, "the world is full of trouble." One day she said to Catherine, "It's my belief my man knows more about your Gerard than anybody in these parts; but he has got to be closer than ever of late. Drop in some day just afore sunset, and set him talking. And for our Lady's sake say not I set you on. The only hiding he ever gave me was for babbling his business; and I do not want another. Gramercy! I married a man for the comfort of the thing, not to be hid."

Catherine dropped in. Jorian was ready enough to tell her how he had befriended her son and perhaps saved his life. But this was no news to Catherine; and the moment she began to cross-question him as to whether he could guess why her lost boy neither came nor wrote, he cast a grim look at his wife, who received it with a calm air of stolid candour and innocent unconsciousness; and his answers became short and sullen. "What should he know more than another?" and so on. He added, after a pause, "Think you the burgomaster takes such as me into his secrets?"

"Oh, then the burgomaster knows something?" said Catherine sharply.

"Likely. Who else should?"

"I'll ask him."

"I would."

"And tell him you say he knows."

"That is right, dame. Go make him mine enemy. That is what a poor fellow always gets if he says a word to you women." And Jorian from that moment shrunk in and became impenetrable as a hedgehog, and almost as prickly.



His conduct caused both the poor women agonies of mind, alarm, and irritated curiosity. Ghysbrecht was for some cause Gerard's mortal enemy; had stopped his marriage, imprisoned him, hunted him. And here was his late servant, who, when off his guard, had hinted that this enemy had the clue to Gerard's silence. After sifting Jorian's every word and look, all remained dark and mysterious. Then Catherine told Margaret to go herself to him. "You are young, you are fair. You will maybe get more out of him than I could."

The conjecture was a reasonable one.

Margaret went with her child in her arms and tapped timidly at Jorian's door just before sunset. "Come in," said a sturdy voice. She entered, and there sat Jorian by the fireside. At sight of her he rose, snorted, and burst out of the house. "Is that for me, wife?" inquired Margaret, turning very red.

"You must excuse him," replied Joan, rather coldly, "he lays it to your door that he is a poor man instead of a rich one. It is something about a piece of parchment. There was one amissing, and he got nought from the burgomaster all along of that one."

"Alas! Gerard took it."

"Likely. But my man says you should not have let him: you were pledged to him to keep them all safe. And sooth to say, I blame not my Jorian for being wroth. 'Tis hard for a poor man to be so near fortune and lose it by those he has befriended. However, I tell *him* another story. Says I, 'Folk that are out o' trouble like you and me didn't ought to be too hard on folk that are in trouble; and she has plenty.' Going already? What is all your hurry, mistress?"

"Oh, it is not for me to drive the goodman out of his own house."

"Well, let me kiss the bairn afore ye go. He is not in fault anyway, poor innocent."

Upon this cruel rebuff Margaret came to a resolution, which she did not confide even to Catherine.

After six weeks' stay that good woman returned home.

On the child's birthday, which occurred soon after, Margaret did no work; but put on her Sunday clothes, and took her boy in her arms and went to the church, and prayed there long and fervently for Gerard's safe return.

That same day and hour Father Clement celebrated a mass and prayed for Margaret's departed soul in the minster church at Basle.

## CHAPTER XXIV

SOME blackguard or other, I think it was Sybrandt, said, "A lie is not like a blow with a curtal axe."

True: for we can predict in some degree the consequences of a stroke with any material weapon. But a lie has no bounds at all. The nature of the thing is to ramify beyond human calculation.

Often in the everyday world a lie has cost a life, or laid waste two or three.

And so, in this story, what tremendous consequences of that one heartless falsehood!

Yet the tellers reaped little from it.

The brothers, who invented it merely to have one claimant the less for their father's property, saw little Gerard take their brother's place in their mother's heart. Nay, more, one day Eli openly proclaimed that, Gerard being lost, and probably dead, he had provided by will for little Gerard, and also for Margaret, his poor son's widow.

At this the look that passed between the black sheep was

a caution to traitors. Cornelis had it on his lips to say Gerard was most likely alive. But he saw his mother looking at him, and checked himself in time.

Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, the other partner in that lie, was now a failing man. He saw the period fast approaching when all his wealth would drop from his body, and his misdeeds cling to his soul.

Too intelligent to deceive himself entirely, he had never been free from gusts of remorse. In taking Gerard's letter to Margaret he had compounded. "I cannot give up land and money," said his giant Avarice. "I will cause her no unnecessary pain," said his dwarf Conscience.

So, after first tampering with the seal, and finding there was not a syllable about the deed, he took it to her with his own hand; and made a merit of it to himself: a set-off; and on a scale not uncommon where the self-accuser is the judge.

The birth of Margaret's child surprised and shocked him, and put his treacherous act in a new light. Should his letter take effect he should cause the dishonour of her who was the daughter of one friend, the granddaughter of another, and whose land he was keeping from her too.

These thoughts preying on him at that period of life when the strength of body decays, and the memory of old friends revives, filled him with gloomy horrors. Yet he was afraid to confess. For the curé was an honest man, and would have made him disgorge. And with him Avarice was an ingrained habit, Penitence only a sentiment.

Matters were thus when, one day, returning from the town-hall to his own house, he found a woman waiting for him in the vestibule, with a child in her arms. She was veiled, and so, concluding she had something to be ashamed of, he addressed her magisterially. On this she let down her veil and looked him full in the face.

It was Margaret Brandt.

Her sudden appearance and manner startled him, and he could not conceal his confusion.

"Where is my Gerard?" cried she, her bosom heaving. "Is he alive?"

"For aught I know," stammered Ghysbrecht. "I hope so, for your sake. Prithee come into this room. The servants!"

"Not a step," said Margaret, and she took him by the shoulder, and held him with all the energy of an excited woman. "You know the secret of that which is breaking my heart. Why does not my Gerard come, nor send a line this many months? Answer me, or all the town is like to hear me, let alone thy servants. My misery is too great to be sported with."

In vain he persisted he knew nothing about Gerard. She told him those who had sent her to him told her another tale. "You do know why he neither comes nor sends," said she firmly.

At this Ghysbrecht turned paler and paler; but he summoned all his dignity, and said, "Would you believe those two knaves against a man of worship?"

"What two knaves?" said she keenly.

He stammered, "Said ye not——? There, I am a poor old broken man, whose memory is shaken. And you come here, and confuse me so. I know not what I say."

"Ay, sir, your memory *is* shaken, or sure you would not be my enemy. My father saved you from the plague when none other would come anigh you; and was ever your friend. My grandfather Floris helped you in your early poverty, and loved you, man and boy. Three generations of us you have seen; and here is the fourth of us; this is your old friend Peter's grandchild, and your old friend Floris his great-grandchild. Look down on his innocent face, and think of theirs!"

"Woman, you torture me," sighed Ghysbrecht, and sank upon a bench. But she saw her advantage, and kneeled before him, and put the boy on his knees. "This fatherless babe is poor Margaret Brandt's that never did you ill, and comes of a race that loved you. Nay, look at his face. 'Twill melt thee more than any word of mine. Saints of heaven, what can a poor desolate girl and her babe have done to wipe out all memory of thine own young days, when thou wert guiltless as he is, that now looks up in thy face and implores thee to give him back his father?"

And with her arms under the child she held him up higher and higher, smiling under the old man's eyes.

He cast a wild look of anguish on the child, and another on the kneeling mother, and started up shrieking, "Avaunt, ye pair of adders."

The stung soul gave the old limbs a momentary vigour, and he walked rapidly, wringing his hands and clutching at his white hair. "Forget those days? I forget all else. O woman, woman, sleeping or waking I see but the faces of the dead, I hear but the voices of the dead, and I shall soon be among the dead. There, there, what is done is done. I am in hell. I am in hell."

And unnatural force ended in prostration.

He staggered, and but for Margaret would have fallen. With her one disengaged arm she supported him as well as she could, and cried for help.

A couple of servants came running, and carried him away in a state bordering on syncope. The last Margaret saw of him was his old furrowed face, white and helpless as his hair that hung down over the servant's elbow.

"Heaven forgive me," she said. "I doubt I have killed the poor old man."

The visit to Tergou took more money than she could well afford; and a customer ran away in her debt. She was



once more compelled to unfold Catherine's angel. But strange to say, as she came downstairs with it in her hand she found some loose silver on the table, with a written line—

*For Gerard his Wife.*

She fell with a cry of surprise on the writing, and soon it rose into a cry of joy.

“He is alive. He sends me this by some friendly hand.”

She kissed the writing again and again, and put it in her bosom.

Time rolled on, and no news of Gerard.

And about every two months a small sum in silver found its way into the house. Sometimes it lay on the table. Once it was flung in through the bedroom window in a purse. Once it was at the bottom of Luke's basket. He had stopped at the public-house to talk to a friend. The giver or his agent was never detected. Catherine disowned it. Margaret Van Eyck swore she had no hand in it. So did Eli. And Margaret, whenever it came, used to say to little Gerard, “Oh, my poor deserted child, you and I are wading in deep waters.”

✓ A change took place in Peter Brandt. His mind, clouded for nearly two years, seemed now to be clearing; he had intervals of intelligence; and then he and Margaret used to talk of Gerard, till he wandered again. But one day, returning after an absence of some hours, Margaret found him conversing with Catherine in a way he had never done since his paralytic stroke. ✓

“Eh, girl, why must you be out?” said she. “But indeed I have told him all; and we have been a-crying together over thy troubles.”

Margaret stood silent, looking joyfully from one to the other.



Peter smiled on her, and said, "Come, let me bless thee."

She kneeled at his feet, and he blessed her most eloquently. He told her she had been all her life the lovingest, truest, and most obedient daughter Heaven ever sent to a poor old widowed man. "May thy son be to thee what thou hast been to me!"

After this he dozed. Then the females whispered together; and Catherine said—"All our talk e'en now was of Gerard. It lies heavy on his mind. His poor head must often have listened to us when it seemed quite dark. Margaret, he is a very understanding man; he thought of many things: 'He may be in prison,' says he, 'or forced to go fighting for some king, or sent to Constantinople to copy books there, or gone into the Church after all.' He had a bent that way."

"Ah, mother," whispered Margaret, in reply, "he doth but deceive himself as we do."

Ere she could finish the sentence, a strange interruption occurred.

A loud voice cried out, "I see him. I see him."

And the old man, with dilating eyes, seemed to be looking right through the wall of the house.

"In a boat; on a great river; coming this way. Sore disfigured; but I knew him. Gone! gone! all dark."

And he sank back, and asked feebly where was Margaret.

"Dear father, I am by thy side. Oh, mother! mother, what is this?"

"I cannot see thee, and but a moment ago I saw all round the world. Ay, ay. Well, I am ready. Is this thy hand? Bless thee, my child, bless thee! Weep not! The tree is ripe."

The old physician read the signs aright. These calm words were his last. The next moment he drooped his head, and gently, placidly, drifted away from earth, like

an infant sinking to rest. The torch had flashed up before. She who had wept for poor old Martin was not likely to bear this blow so stoically as the death of the old is apt to be borne. In vain Catherine tried to console her with commonplaces; in vain told her it was a happy release for him; and that, as he himself had said, the tree was ripe. But her worst failure was, when she urged that there were now but two mouths to feed; and one care the less.

"Such cares are all the joys I have," said Margaret. "They fill my desolate heart, which now seems void as well as waste. Oh, empty chair, my bosom it aches to see thee! Poor old man, how could I love him by halves, I that did use to sit and look at him and think, 'But for me thou wouldst die of hunger.' He, so wise, so learned erst, was got to be helpless as my own sweet babe, and I loved him as if he had been my child instead of my father. Oh, empty chair! Oh, empty heart! Well-a-day! well-a-day!"

And the pious tears would not be denied.

## CHAPTER XXV

BROTHER CLEMENT had taught and preached in Basle more than a twelvemonth, when one day Jerome stood before him, dusty, with a triumphant glance in his eye.

"Give the glory to God, Brother Clement; thou canst now wend to England with me."

"I am ready, Brother Jerome; and, expecting thee these many months, have in the intervals of teaching and devotion studied the English tongue somewhat closely."

"'Twas well thought of," said Jerome. He then told him he had but delayed till he could obtain extraordinary powers from the Pope to collect money for the Church's use in England, and to hear confession in all the secular

monasteries. "So now gird up thy loins, and let us go forth and deal a good blow for the Church, and against the Franciscans."

The two friars went preaching down the Rhine for England. In the larger places they both preached. At the smaller they often divided, and took different sides of the river, and met again at some appointed spot. Both were able orators, but in different styles.

Jerome's was noble and impressive, but a little contracted in religious topics, and a trifle monotonous in delivery compared with Clement's, though in truth not so, compared with most preachers.

And so they came slowly down the Rhine, sometimes drifting a few miles on the stream; but in general walking by the bank preaching, and teaching, and confessing.

*Then Jerome sailed for England. But Gerard went to Sevenbergen to search for Margaret's tomb.*

He went into the church, and after kissing the steps, prayed long and earnestly for the soul of her whose resting-place he could not find.

Coming out of the church, he saw a very old man looking over the little churchyard gate. He went towards him, and asked him did he live in the place.

"Four score and twelve years, man and boy. And I come here every day of late, holy father, to take a peep. This is where I look to bide ere long."

"My son, can you tell me where Margaret lies?"

"Margaret? There's a many Margarets here."

"Margaret Brandt. She was daughter to a learned physician."

"What, is she dead? Margaret a Peter dead? Now, only think on't. Like enow; like enow. They great towns do terribly disagree wi' country folk."

"What great towns, my son?"

"Well, 'twas Rotterdam they went to from here, so I heard tell; or was it Amsterdam? Nay, I trow 'twas Rotterdam. And gone there to die!"

Clement sighed.

"God bless thee, my son," said Clement; "farewell!" and he hurried away.

He reached the convent at sunset, and watched and prayed in the chapel for Jerome and Margaret till it was long past midnight, and his soul had recovered its cold calm.

## CHAPTER XXVI

*ALL the world was talking of the great preacher at the Church of St. Lawrence. Margaret resolved to go and hear him, so, leaving little Gerard with Kate, she started. The sermon had begun when she entered; she got behind a pillar in the north aisle, but could hear nothing but the tones of the preacher's melodious voice.*

Presently she saw a lady leave an excellent place opposite to get out of the sun, which was indeed pouring on her head from the window. Margaret went round softly but swiftly; and was fortunate enough to get the place. She was now beside a pillar of the south aisle, and not above fifty feet from the preacher. She was at his side, a little behind him, but could hear every word.

Yet she now leaned a little forward with downcast eyes, hoping for that accent again. It did not come. But the whole voice grew strangely upon her. It rose and fell as the preacher warmed; and it seemed to waken faint echoes of a thousand happy memories. She would not look to dispel the melancholy pleasure this voice gave her.

Presently, in the middle of an eloquent period, the preacher stopped.

She followed the looks of the people; and there, in the pulpit, was a face as of a staring corpse. The friar's eyes, naturally large, and made larger by the thinness of his cheeks, were dilated to supernatural size, and glaring, her way, out of a bloodless face.

Momentary as that glance was, it caught in that stricken face an expression that made her shiver.

She turned faint, and sat down on a heap of chips the workmen had left, and buried her face in her hands. The sermon went on again. She heard the sound of it; but not the sense. She tried to think, but her mind was in a whirl. Thought would fix itself in no shape but this; that on that prodigy-stricken face she had seen a look stamped. And the recollection of that look now made her quiver from head to foot.

For that look was "Recognition."

The sermon, after wavering some time, ended in a strain of exalted, nay, feverish eloquence, that went far to make the crowd forget the preacher's strange pause and ghastly glare.

Margaret mingled hastily with the crowd, and went out of the church with them.

They went their ways home. But she turned at the door, and went into the churchyard; to Peter's grave. Poor as she was, she had given him a slab and a headstone. She sat down on the slab, and kissed it. Then threw her apron over her head that no one might distinguish her by her hair.

"Father," she said, "thou hast often heard me say I am wading in deep waters; but now I begin to think God only knows the bottom of them. I'll follow that friar round the world, but I'll see him at arm's length. And he



shall tell me why he looked towards me like a dead man wakened; and not a soul behind me. Oh, father, you often praised me here; speak a word for me *there*. For I am wading in deep waters."

Her father's tomb commanded a side view of the church door.

And on that tomb she sat, with her face covered, way-laying the holy preacher.

The sermon ended, he sat down on the pulpit stool, terribly shaken. But presently an idea very characteristic of the time took possession of him. He had sought her grave at Sevenbergen in vain. She had now been permitted to appear to him, and show him that she was buried *here*; probably hard by that very pillar, where her spirit had showed itself to him.

This idea once adopted soon settled on his mind with all the certainty of a fact. And he felt he had only to speak to the sexton (whom, to his great disgust, he had seen working during the sermon), to learn the spot where she was laid.

The church was now quite empty. He came down from the pulpit and stepped through an aperture in the south wall on to the grass, and went up to the sexton. He knew him in a moment. But Jorian never suspected the poor lad, whose life he had saved, in this holy friar. The loss of his shapely beard had wonderfully altered the outline of his face. This had changed him even more than his tonsure, his short hair sprinkled with premature gray, and his cheeks thinned and paled by fasts and vigils.

"My son," said Friar Clement softly, "if you keep any memory of those whom you lay in the earth, prithee tell me is any Christian buried inside the church, near one of the pillars?"



"Nay, father," said Jorian, "here in the churchyard lie buried all that buried be. Why?"

"No matter. Prithee tell me then where lieth Margaret Brandt."

"Margaret Brandt?" And Jorian stared stupidly at the speaker.

"She died about three years ago, and was buried here."

"Oh, that is another matter," said Jorian; "that was before my time: the vicar could tell you, likely; if so be she was a gentlewoman, or at the least rich enough to pay him his fee."

"Alas, my son, she was poor (and paid a heavy penalty for it); but born of decent folk. Her father, Peter, was a learned physician; she came hither from Sevenbergen—to die."

When Clement had uttered these words his head sank upon his breast, and he seemed to have no power nor wish to question Jorian more. I doubt even if he knew where he was. He was lost in the past.

Jorian put down his spade, and standing upright in the grave, set his arms akimbo, and said sulkily, "Are you making a fool of me, holy sir, or has some wag been making a fool of you?"

And having relieved his mind thus, he proceeded to dig again, with a certain vigour that showed his somewhat irritable temper was ruffled.

Clement gazed at him with a puzzled but gently reproachful eye, for the tone was rude, and the words unintelligible.

Good-natured, though crusty, Jorian had not thrown up three spadefuls ere he became ashamed of it himself. "Why, what a base churl am I to speak thus to thee, holy father; and thou a-standing there, looking at me like a lamb. Aha! I have it; 'tis Peter Brandt's grave

you would fain see, not Margaret's. He does lie here; hard by the west door. There; I'll show you." And he laid down his spade, and put on his doublet and jerkin to go with the friar.

He did not know there was anybody sitting on Peter's tomb. Still less that she was watching for this holy friar.

While Jorian was putting on his doublet and jerkin to go to Peter's tomb, his tongue was not idle. "They used to call him a magician out Sevenbergen way. And they do say he gave 'em a touch of his trade at parting; told 'em he saw Margaret's lad a-coming down Rhine in brave clothes and store o' money, but his face scarred by foreign glaive, and not altogether so many arms and legs as a went away wi'. But, dear heart, nought came on't. Margaret is still wearying for her lad; and Peter, he lies as quiet as his neighbours; not but what she hath put a stone slab over him, to keep him where he is; as you shall see."

He put both hands on the edge of the grave, and was about to raise himself out of it, but the friar laid a trembling hand on his shoulder, and said in a strange whisper—

"How long since died Peter Brandt?"

"About two months. Why?"

"And his daughter buried him, say you?"

"Nay, I buried him, but she paid the fee and reared the stone. • Why?"

"Then—but he had but one daughter; Margaret?"

"No more; leastways, that he owned to."

"Then you think Margaret is—is alive?"

"Think? Why, I should be dead else. Riddle me that."

Jorian stared, and after a considerable silence said, very gravely, "Father, you have asked me many questions, and

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I have answered them truly; now for our Lady's sake answer me but two. Did you in very sooth know one who loved this poor lass? Where?"

Clement was on the point of revealing himself, but he remembered Jerome, and shrank from being called by the name he had borne in the world.

"I knew him in Italy," said he.

"If you knew him you can tell me his name," said Jorian cautiously.

"His name was Gerard Eliassoen."

"Oh, but this is strange. Stay, what made thee say Margaret Brandt was dead?"

"I was with Gerard when a letter came from Margaret Van Eyck. The letter told him she he loved was dead and buried. Let me sit down, for my strength fails me. Foul play! Foul play!"

"Father," said Jorian, "I thank Heaven for sending thee to me. Ay, sit ye down; ye do look like a ghost; ye fast overmuch to be strong. My mind misgives me; methinks I hold the clue to this riddle, and, if I do, there be two knaves in this town whose heads I would fain batter to pieces as I do this mould;" and he clenched his teeth and raised his long spade above his head, and brought it furiously down upon the heap several times. "Foul play? You never said a truer word i' your life; and, if you know where Gerard is now, lose no time, but show him the trap they have laid for him. Mine is but a dull head, but whiles the slow hound puzzles out the scent—go to. And I do think you and I ha' got hold of two ends o' one stick, and a main foul one."

Jorian then, after some of those useless preliminaries men of his class always deal in, came to the point of the story. He had been employed by the burgomaster of Tergou to repair the floor of an upper room in his house,

and when it was almost done, coming suddenly to fetch away his tools, curiosity had been excited by some loud words below, and he had lain down on his stomach, and heard the burgomaster talking about a letter which Cornelis and Sybrandt were minded to convey into the place of one that a certain Hans Memling was taking to Gerard; "and it seems their will was good, but their stomach was small; so to give them courage the old man showed them a drawer full of silver, and if they did the trick they should each put a hand in, and have all the silver they could hold in't. Well, father," continued Jorian, "I thought not much on't at the time, except for the bargain itself, *that* kept me awake mostly all night. Think on't! Next morning at peep of day who should I see but my masters Cornelis and Sybrandt come out of their house each with a black eye. 'Oho,' says I, 'what yon Hans hath put his mark on ye; well now I hope that is all you have got for your pains.' Didn't they make for the burgomaster's house? I to my hiding-place."

At this part of Jorian's revelation the monk's nostril dilated, and his restless eye showed the suspense he was in.

The monk started wildly up, livid with fury and despair, and rushed headlong from the place with both hands clenched and raised on high.

While thus absorbed he felt his arm grasped by a small, tremulous hand.

It was Margaret Brandt.

He started; her coming there just then seemed so strange.

She had waited long on Peter's tombstone, but the friar did not come. So she went into the church to see if he was there still. She could not find him.

Presently, going up the south aisle, the gigantic shadow of a friar came rapidly along the floor and part of a pillar,

and seemed to pass through her. She was near screaming; but in a moment remembered Jorian's shadow had come in so from the churchyard; and tried to clamber out the nearest way. She did so, but with some difficulty; and by that time Clement was just disappearing down the street; yet, so expressive at times is the body as well as the face, she could see he was greatly agitated. Jorian and she looked at one another, and at the wild figure of the distant friar.

"Well?" said she to Jorian, trembling.

"Well?" said he, "you startled me. How come you here of all people?"

"Is this a time for idle chat? What said he to you? He has been speaking to you; deny it not."

"Girl, as I stand here, he asked me whereabouts you were buried in this churchyard."

"Ah!"

"I told him, nowhere, thank Heaven: you were alive and saving other folk from the churchyard."

"Well?"

"Well, the long and the short is, he knew thy Gerard in Italy; and a letter came saying you were dead; and it broke thy poor lad's heart. Let me see; who was the letter written by? Oh, by the demoiselle Van Eyck. That was *his* way of it. But I up and told him nay; 'twas neither demoiselle nor dame that penned yon lie, but Ghysbrecht Van Swieten, and those foul knaves, Cornelis and Sybrandt; these changed the true letter for one of their own; I told him as how I saw the whole villainy done through a chink; and now, if I have not been and told."

"Oh, Jorian, what have you done?" cried Margaret. "Quick! quick! help me thither, for the power is gone all out of my body. You know him not as I do. Oh, if you had seen the blow he gave Ghysbrecht; and heard the frightful



crash! Come, save him from worse mischief. The water is deep enow; but not bloody yet; come!"

Her accents were so full of agony that Jorian sprang out of the grave and came with her, huddling on his jerkin as he went.

But as they hurried along, he asked her what on earth she meant. "I talk of this friar, and you answer me of Gerard."

"Man, see you not, *this* is Gerard!"

"This Gerard? what mean ye?"

"I mean, yon friar is my boy's father. I have waited for him long, Jorian. Well, he is come to me at last. And thank God for it. Oh, my poor child! Quicker, Jorian, quicker!"

"Why, thou art mad as he. Stay! By St. Bavon, yon *was* Gerard's face; 'twas nought like it; yet somehow—'twas it. Come on! come on! let me see the end of this."

"The end? How many of us will live to see that?"

He supported her trembling limbs into the house.

It seemed unnaturally still; not a sound.

Jorian's own heart beat fast.

A door was before him, unlatched. He pushed it softly with his left hand, and Margaret and he stood on the threshold.

What they saw there you shall soon know.

## CHAPTER XXVII

It was supper-time. Eli's family were collected round the board; Margaret only was missing. To Catherine's surprise, Eli said he would wait a bit for her.

"Why, I told her you would not wait for the Duke."

"She is not the Duke; she is a poor, good lass, that hath waited not minutes, but years, for a graceless son of



mine. You can put the meat on the board all the same ; then we can fall to, without further loss o' time, when she does come."

The smoking dishes smelt so savoury that Eli gave way. "She will come if we begin," said he ; "they always do. Come, sit ye down, Mistress Joan ; y'are not here for a slave, I trow, but a guest. There, I hear a quick step—off covers, and fall to."

The covers were withdrawn, and the knives brandished. Then burst into the room, not the expected Margaret, but a Dominican friar, livid with rage.

He was at the table in a moment, in front of Cornelis and Sybrandt. "Cursed be the lips," he shrieked, "which spoke the lie that Margaret was dead ; may they rot before the grave, and kiss white-hot iron in hell thereafter ; doubly cursed be the hands that changed those letters, and be they struck off by the hangman's knife, and handle hell fire for ever ; thrice accursed be the cruel hearts that did conceive that damned lie, to part true love for ever ; may they sicken and wither on earth joyless, loveless, hopeless ; and wither to dust before their time ; and burn in eternal fire." He cursed the meat at their mouths and every atom of their bodies, from their hair to the soles of their feet. Then turning from the cowering, shuddering pair, who had almost hid themselves beneath the table, he tore a letter out of his bosom, and flung it down before his father.

"Read that, thou hard old man, that didst imprison thy son, read, and see what monsters thou hast brought into the world. The memory of my wrongs and hers dwell with you all for ever ! I will meet you again at the judgment day ; on earth ye will never see me more." And in a moment, as he had come, so he was gone, leaving them stiff, and cold, and white as statues round the smoking board.

And this was the sight that greeted Margaret's eyes and Jorian's—pale figures of men and women, petrified around the untasted food, as Eastern poets feigned.

Margaret glanced her eye round, and gasped out, "Oh, joy! all here; no blood hath been shed. Oh, you cruel, cruel men! I thank God he hath not slain you."

At sight of her Catherine gave an eloquent scream; then turned her head away. But Eli, who had just cast his eye over the false letter, and begun to understand it all, seeing the other victim come in at that very moment with *her* wrongs reflected in her sweet, pale face, started to his feet in a transport of rage, and shouted, "Stand clear, and let me get at the traitors. I'll hang for them." And in a moment he whipped out his short sword, and fell upon them.

"Fly!" screamed Margaret. "Fly!"

They slipped howling under the table, and crawled out the other side.

But ere they could get to the door, the furious old man ran round and intercepted them. Catherine only screamed and wrung her hands; your notables are generally useless at such a time: and blood would certainly have flowed, but Margaret and Jorian seized the fiery old man's arms, and held them with all their might, whilst the pair got clear of the house; then they let him go; and he went vainly raging after them out into the street. They were a furlong off, running like hares. He hacked down the board on which their names were written, and brought it indoors, and flung it into the chimney-place.

Catherine was sitting rocking herself with her apron over her head. Joan had run to her husband. Margaret had her arms round Catherine's neck; and, pale and panting, was yet making efforts to comfort her.

But it was not to be done. "Oh, my poor children!"

she cried. "Oh, miserable mother! 'Tis a mercy Kate was ill upstairs. There, I have lived to thank God for that!" she cried, with a fresh burst of sobs. "It would have killed her. He had better have stayed in Italy, as come home to curse his own flesh and blood and set us all by the ears."

"Oh, hold your chat, woman," cried Eli angrily; "you are still on the side of the ill-doer. You are cheap served; your weakness made the rogues what they are; I was for correcting them in their youth: for sore ills, sharp remedies; but you still sided with their faults, and undermined me, and baffled wise severity. And you, Margaret, leave comforting her that ought rather to comfort you; for what is her hurt to yours? But she never had a grain of justice under her skin; and never will. So come thou to me, that am thy father from this hour."

Jorian took his wife home, and heavy sadness reigned in Eli's house that night.

Meantime, where was Clement?

Lying at full length upon the floor of the convent church, with his lips upon the lowest step of the altar, in an indescribable state of terror, misery, penitence, and self-abasement: through all which struggled gleams of joy that Margaret was alive.

Night fell and found him lying there weeping and praying; and morning would have found him there too; but he suddenly remembered that, absorbed in his own wrongs and Margaret's, he had committed another sin besides intemperate rage. He had neglected a dying man.

He rose instantly, groaning at his accumulated wickedness, and set out to repair the omission. The weather had changed; it was raining hard, and when he got clear of the town, he heard the wolves baying; they were on

the foot. But Clement was himself again, or nearly; he thought little of danger or discomfort, having a shameful omission of religious duty to repair: he went stoutly forward through rain and darkness.

And as he went, he often beat his breast, and cried, "Mea culpa! Mea culpa!"

It was the day after that terrible scene: the little house in the Hoog Straet was like a grave, and none more listless and dejected than Catherine, so busy and sprightly by nature. After dinner, her eyes red with weeping, she went to the convent to try and soften Gerard, and lay the first stone at least of a reconciliation. It was some time before she could make the porter understand whom she was seeking. Eventually she learned he had left late last night, and was not expected back. She went sighing with the news to Margaret. She found her sitting idle, like one with whom life had lost its savour; she had her boy clasped so tight in her arms, as if he was all she had left, and she feared some one would take him too. Catherine begged her to come to the Hoog Straet.

"What for?" sighed Margaret. "You cannot but say to yourselves, 'she is the cause of all.'"

"Nay, nay," said Catherine, "we are not so ill-hearted, and Eli is so fond on you; you will maybe soften him."

"Oh, if you think I can do any good, I'll come," said Margaret, with a weary sigh.

They found Eli and a carpenter putting up another name in place of Cornelis and Sybrandt's; and what should that name be but Margaret Brandt's.

With all her affection for Margaret, this went through poor Catherine like a knife. "The bane of one is another's meat," said she.

"Can he make me spend the money unjustly?" replied Margaret coldly.

"You are a good soul," said Catherine. "Ay, so best, sith he is the strongest."

The next day Giles dropped in, and Catherine told the story all in favour of the black sheep, and invited his pity for them, anathematised by their brother, and turned on the wide world by their father. But Giles's prejudices ran the other way; he heard her out, and told her bluntly the knaves had got off cheap; they deserved to be hanged at Margaret's door into the bargain, and, dismissing them with contempt, crowed with delight at the return of his favourite. "I'll show him," said he, "what 'tis to have a brother at court with a heart to serve a friend, and a head to point the way."

"Bless thee, Giles," murmured Margaret softly.

"Thou wast ever his stanch friend, dear Giles," said little Kate.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT that sensitive mind, and tender conscience, and loving heart, and religious soul went through even in a few hours, under a situation so sudden and tremendous, is perhaps beyond the power of words to paint. Fancy yourself the man; and then put yourself in his place! Were I to write a volume on it, we should have to come to that at last. I shall relate his next two overt acts. They indicate his state of mind after the first fierce tempest of the soul had subsided.

After spending the night with the dying hermit in giving and receiving holy consolations, he set out not for Rotterdam, but for Tergou. He went there to confront his fatal enemy the burgomaster, and by means of that parchment, whose history by the by was itself a romance, to make him disgorge; and give Margaret her own.



Heated and dusty, he stopped at the fountain, and there began to eat his black bread and drink of the water. But in the middle of his frugal meal a female servant came running, and begged him to come and shrive her dying master. He returned the bread to his wallet, and followed her without a word. She took him—to the Stadthouse.

He drew back with a little shudder when he saw her go in. But he almost instantly recovered himself, and followed her into the house, and up the stairs. And there in bed, propped up by pillows, lay his deadly enemy, looking already like a corpse.

Clement eyed him a moment from the door, and thought of all—the tower, the wood, the letter. Then he said in a low voice, “Pax vobiscum!” He trembled a little while he said it. The sick man welcomed him as eagerly as his weak state permitted. “Thank Heaven, thou art come in time to absolve me from my sins, father, and pray for my soul, thou and thy brethren.”

“My son,” said Clement, “before absolution cometh confession. In which act there must be no reservation, as thou valuest thy soul’s weal. Bethink thee, therefore, wherein thou hast most offended God and the Church, while I offer up a prayer for wisdom to direct thee.”

Clement then kneeled and prayed; and when he rose from his knees, he said to Ghysbrecht, with apparent calmness, “My son, confess thy sins.”

“Ay, father,” said the sick man, “they are many and great.”

“Great, then, be thy penitence, my son; so shalt thou find God’s mercy great.”

Ghysbrecht put his hands together, and began to confess with every appearance of contrition.

He owned he had eaten meat in mid-Lent. He had often absented himself from mass on the Lord’s day and



saints' days; and had trifled with other religious observances, which he enumerated with scrupulous fidelity.

When he had done, the friar said quietly, "'Tis well, my son. These be faults. Now to thy crimes. Thou hadst done better to begin with them?"

"Why, father, what crimes lie to my account if these be none?"

"Am I confessing to thee, or thou to me?" said Clement somewhat severely.

"Forgive me, father! Why, surely, I to you. But I know not what you call crimes."

"The seven deadly sins, art thou clear of them?"

"Heaven forfend I should be guilty of them. I know them not by name."

"Many do them all that cannot name them. Begin with that one which leads to lying, theft, and murder."

"I am quit of that one, anyway. How call you it?"

"Avarice, my son."

"Avarice? Oh, as to that, I have been a saving man all my days; but I have kept a good table, and not altogether forgotten the poor. But, alas, I am a great sinner. Mayhap the next will catch me? What is the next?"

"We have not yet done with this one. Bethink thee, the Church is not to be trifled with."

"Alas! am I in a condition to trifle with her now? Avarice? Avarice?" He looked puzzled and innocent.

"Hast thou ever robbed the fatherless?" inquired the friar.

"Me? robbed the fatherless?" gasped Ghysbrecht; "not that I mind."

"Once more, my son, I am forced to tell thee thou art trifling with the Church. Miserable man! another evasion, and I leave thee, and fiends will straightway gather round thy bed, and tear thee down to the bottomless pit."

"Oh, leave me not! leave me not!" shrieked the terrified old man. "The Church knows all. I *must* have robbed the fatherless. I will confess. Who shall I begin with? My memory for names is shaken."

The defence was skilful, but in this case failed.

"Hast thou forgotten Floris Brandt?" said Clement stonily. The sick man reared himself in bed in a pitiable state of terror.

"How knew you that?" said he.

"The Church knows many things," said Clement coldly, "and by many ways that are dark to thee. Miserable impenitent, you called her to your side, hoping to deceive her. You said, 'I will not confess to the curé, but to some friar who knows not my misdeeds. So will I cheat the Church on my deathbed, and die as I have lived.' But God, kinder to thee than thou art to thyself, sent to thee one whom thou couldst not deceive. He has tried thee; he was patient with thee, and warned thee not to trifle with Holy Church; but all is in vain; thou canst not confess; for thou art impenitent as a stone. Die, then, as thou hast lived. Methinks I see the fiends crowding round the bed for their prey. They wait but for me to go. And I go."

He turned his back; but Ghysbrecht, in extremity of terror, caught him by the frock. "Oh, holy man, mercy! stay. I will confess all, all. I robbed my friend Floris. Alas! would it had ended there; for he lost little by me; but I kept the land from Peter his son, and from Margaret, Peter's daughter. Yet I was always going to give it back; but I couldn't, I couldn't."

"Avarice, my son, avarice. Happy for thee 'tis not too late."

"No; I will leave it her by will. She will not have long to wait for it now; not above a month or two at furthest."

"For which month's possession thou wouldst damn thy soul for ever. Thou fool!"

The sick man groaned, and prayed the friar to be reasonable. The friar firmly, but gently and persuasively, persisted, and with infinite patience detached the dying man's gripe from another's property. There were times when his patience was tried, and he was on the point of thrusting his hand into his bosom and producing the deed, which he had brought for that purpose; but after yesterday's outbreak he was on his guard against choler; and, to conclude, he conquered his impatience; he conquered a personal repugnance to the man, so strong as to make his own flesh creep all the time he was struggling with this miser for his soul; and at last, without a word about the deed, he won upon him to make full and prompt restitution.

How the restitution was made will be briefly related elsewhere: also certain curious effects produced upon Ghysbrecht by it; and when and on what terms Ghysbrecht and Clement parted.

I promised to relate two acts of the latter, indicative of his mind. This is one. The other is told in two words. As soon as he was quite sure Margaret had her own, and was a rich woman—he disappeared.

\* \* \* \* \*

A shuffling of feet was heard at the door, and a colourless, feeble old man was assisted into the room. It was Ghysbrecht Van Swieten. At sight of him Catherine shrieked, and threw her apron over her head, and Margaret shuddered violently, and turned her head swiftly away, not to see him.

A feeble voice issued from the strange visitor's lips, "Good people, a dying man hath come to ask your forgiveness."

"Come to look on your work, you mean," said Catherine, taking down her apron and bursting out sobbing. "There, there, she is fainting; look to her, Eli, quick."

"Nay," said Margaret, in a feeble voice, "the sight of him gave me a turn, that is all. Prithee, let him say his say, and go; for he is the murtherer of me and mine."

"Alas," said Ghysbrecht, "I am too feeble to say it standing, and no one biddeth me sit down."

Eli, who had followed him into the house, interfered here, and said, half sullenly, half apologetically, "Well, burgomaster, 'tis not our wont to leave a visitor standing whiles we sit. But man, man, you have wrought us too much ill." And the honest fellow's voice began to shake with anger he fought hard to contain, because it was his own house. Then Ghysbrecht found an advocate in one who seldom spoke in vain in that family.

It was little Kate. "Father, mother," said she, "my duty to you, but this is not well. Death squares all accounts. And see you not death in his face? I shall not live long, good friends; and his time is shorter than mine."

Eli made haste and set a chair for their dying enemy with his own hands. Ghysbrecht's attendants put him into it. "Go fetch the boxes," said he. They brought in two boxes, and then retired, leaving their master alone in the family he had so cruelly injured.

Every eye was now bent on him, except Margaret's. He undid the boxes with unsteady fingers, and brought out of one the title-deeds of a property at Tergou. "This land and these houses belonged to Floris Brandt, and do belong to thee of right, his granddaughter. These I did usurp for a debt long since defrayed with interest. These I now restore their rightful owner with penitent tears. In this other box are three hundred and forty golden angels, being the rent and fines I have received from that

land more than Floris Brandt's debt to me. I have kept compt, still meaning to be just one day; but Avarice withheld me. Pray, good people, against temptation! I was not born dishonest: yet you see."

"Well, to be sure!" cried Catherine. "And you the burgomaster! Hast whipt good store of thieves in thy day. However," said she, on second thoughts, "'tis better late than never. What, Margaret, art deaf? The good man hath brought thee back thine own. Art a rich woman. Alack, what a mountain o' gold!"

"Bid him keep land and gold, and give me back my Gerard, that he stole from me with his treason," said Margaret, with her head still averted.

"Alas!" said Ghysbrecht, "would I could. What I can I have done. Is it nought? It cost me a sore struggle; and I rose from my last bed to do it myself, lest some mischance should come between her and her rights."

"Old man," said Margaret, "since thou, whose idol is pelf, hast done this, God and the saints will, as I hope, forgive thee. As for me, I am neither saint nor angel, but only a poor woman, whose heart thou hast broken. Speak to him, Kate, for I am like the dead."

Kate meditated a little while; and then her soft silvery voice fell like a soothing melody upon the air. "My poor sister hath a sorrow that riches cannot heal. Give her time, Ghysbrecht; 'tis not in nature she should forgive thee all. Her boy is fatherless; and she is neither maid, wife, nor widow: and the blow fell but two days syne, that laid her heart a-bleeding."

A single heavy sob from Margaret was the comment to these words.

"Therefore, give her time! And ere thou diest, she will forgive thee all, ay, even to pleasure me, that haply shall not be long behind thee, Ghysbrecht. Meantime, we,



whose wounds be sore, but not so deep as hers, do pardon thee, a penitent and a dying man; and, I, for one, will pray for thee from this hour; go in peace!"

Their little oracle had spoken; it was enough. Eli even invited him to break a manchet and drink a stoup of wine to give him heart for his journey.

But Ghysbrecht declined, and said what he had done was a cordial to him. "Man seeth but a little way before him, neighbour. This land, I clung so to it, was a bed of nettles to me all the time. 'Tis gone: and I feel happier and livelier like for the loss on't.

He called his men, and they lifted him into the litter.

When he was gone Catherine gloated over the money. She had never seen so much together, and was almost angry with Margaret for "sitting out there like an image." And she dilated on the advantages of money.

And she teased Margaret till at last she prevailed on her to come and look at it.

"Better let her be, mother," said Kate. "How can she relish gold, with a heart in her bosom liker lead?" But Catherine persisted.

The result was, Margaret looked down at all her wealth with wondering eyes. Then suddenly wrung her hands and cried with piercing anguish, "Too late! Too late!" And shook off her leaden despondency, only to go into strong hysterics over the wealth that came too late to be shared with him she loved.

A little of this gold, a portion of this land, a year or two ago, when it was as much her own as now; and Gerard would have never left her side for Italy or any other place.

Too late! Too late!



## CHAPTER XXIX

NOR many days after this came the news that Margaret Van Eyck was dead and buried. By a will she had made a year before, she left all her property, after her funeral expenses and certain presents to Reicht Heynes, to her dear daughter Margaret Brandt, requesting her to keep Reicht as long as unmarried. By this will Margaret inherited a furnished house, and pictures and sketches that in the present day would be a fortune: among the pictures was one she valued more than a gallery of others. It represented "A Betrothal." The solemnity of the ceremony was marked in the grave face of the man, and the demure complacency of the woman. She was painted almost entirely by Margaret Van Eyck, but the rest of the picture by Jan. The accessories were exquisitely finished, and remain a marvel of skill to this day. Margaret Brandt sent word to Reicht to stay in the house till such time as she could find the heart to put foot in it, and miss the face and voice that used to meet her there; and to take special care of the picture "in the little cubboord:" meaning the diptych.

The next thing was, Luke Peterson came home, and heard that Gerard was a monk. He was like to go mad with joy. He came to Margaret, and said—

"Never heed, mistress. If he cannot marry you I can."

"You?" said Margaret. "Why, I have seen him."

"But he is a friar."

"He was my husband and my boy's father long ere he was a friar. And I have seen him. I've *seen* him."

Luke was thoroughly puzzled. "I'll tell you what," said he; "I have got a cousin a lawyer. I'll go and ask him whether you are married or single."

"Nay, I shall ask my own heart, not a lawyer. So that

is your regard for me; to go making me the town talk, oh, fie!"

"That is done already without a word from me."

"But not as such as seek my respect. And if you do it, never come nigh me again."

"Ay," said Luke, with a sigh, "you are like a dove to all the rest; but you are a hard-hearted tyrant to me."

"'Tis your own fault, dear Luke, for wooing me. That is what lets me from being as kind to you as I desire. Luke, my bonny lad, listen to me. I am rich now; I can make my friends happy, though not myself. Look round the street, look round the parish. There is many a quean in it fairer than I twice told, and not spoiled with weeping. Look high; and take your choice. Speak you to the lass herself, and I'll speak to the mother; they shall not say thee nay; take my word for't."

"I see what ye mean," said Luke, turning very red. "But if I can't have your liking, I will none o' your money. I was your servant when you were poor as I; and poorer. No; if you would liever be a friar's leman than an honest man's wife, you are not the woman I took you for: so part we withouten malice: seek you your comfort on yon road, where never a she did find it yet, and, for me, I'll live and die a bachelor. Good even, mistress."

"Farewell, dear Luke; and God forgive you for saying *that* to me."

For some days Margaret dreaded, almost as much as she desired, the coming interview with Gerard. She said to herself, "I wonder not he keeps away a while; for so should I." However, he would hear he was a father; and the desire to see their boy would overcome everything. "And," said the poor girl to herself, "if so be that meeting does not kill me, I feel I shall be better after it than I am now."

But when day after day went by, and he was not heard of, a freezing suspicion began to crawl and creep towards her mind. What if his absence was intentional? What if he had gone to some cold-blooded monks his fellows, and they had told him never to see her more? The convent had ere this shown itself as merciless to true lovers as the grave itself.

At this thought the very life seemed to die out of her.

And now for the first time deep indignation mingled at times with her grief and apprehension. "Can he have ever loved me? To run from me and his boy without a word! Why, this poor Luke thinks more of me than he does."

While her mind was in this state, Giles came roaring. "I've hit the clout; our Gerard is Vicar of Gouda."

A very brief sketch of the dwarf's court life will suffice to prepare the reader for his own account of this feat. Some months before he went to court his intelligence had budded. He himself dated the change from a certain eighth of June, when, swinging by one hand along with the week's washing on a tight rope in the drying ground, something went crack inside his head; and lo! intellectual powers unchained. At court his shrewdness and bluntness of speech, coupled with his gigantic voice and his small stature, made him a Power.

Finding Margaret unable to believe the good news, and sceptical as to the affairs of Holy Church being administered by dwarfs, he narrated as follows:—

"When the princess sent for me to her bedroom as of custom to keep her out of languor, I came not mirthful nor full of country dicts, as is my wont, but dull as lead.

"'Why, what aileth thee?' quo' she. 'Art sick?' 'At heart,' quo' I. 'Alas, he is in love,' quo' she. Whereat five brazen hussies, which they call them maids of honour,

did giggle loud. 'Not so mad as that,' said I, 'seeing what I see at court of women folk.'

"'There, ladies,' quo' the princess, 'best let him a-be. 'Tis a liberal mannikin, and still giveth more than he taketh of saucy words.'

"'In all sadness,' quo' she, 'what is the matter?'

"I told her I was meditating, and what perplexed me was, that other folk could now and then keep their word, but princes never.

"'Heyday,' says she, 'thy shafts fly high this morn.' I told her, 'Ay, for they hit the Truth.'

"She said I was as keen as keen; but it became not me to put riddles to her, nor her to answer them. 'Stand aloof a bit, mesdames,' said she, 'and thou speak withouten fear;' for she saw I was in sad earnest.

"I began to quake a bit, for mind ye, she can doff freedom and don dignity quicker than she can slip out of her dressing-gown into kirtle of state. But I made my voice so soft as honey (whereof smilest?), and I said, 'Madam, one evening, a matter of five years ago, as ye sat with your mother, the Countess of Charolois, who is now in heaven, worse luck, you wi' your lute, and she wi' her tapestry, or the like, do ye mind there came into ye a fair youth—with a letter from a painter body, one Margaret Van Eyck?'

"She said she thought she did. 'Was it not a tall youth,' exceeding comely?'

"'Ay, madam,' said I; 'he was my brother.'

"'Your brother?' said she, and did eye me like all over. (What dost smile at?)

"So I told her all that passed between her and Gerard, and how she was for giving him a bishopric; but the good countess said, 'Gently, Marie! he is too young;' and with that they did both promise him a living. 'Yet,' said I, 'he

hath been a priest a long while, and no living. Hence my bile.'

"'Alas!' said she, 'tis not by my good will; for all this thou hast said is sooth, and more. I do remember my dear mother said to me, "See thou to it if I be not here."' So then she cried out, 'Ay, dear mother, no word of thine shall ever fall to the ground.'

"I, seeing her so ripe, said quickly, 'Madam, the Vicar of Gouda died last week.' (For when ye seek favours of the great, behoves ye know the very thing ye aim at.)

"Then thy brother is Vicar of Gouda,' quo' she, 'so sure as I am heiress of Burgundy and the Netherlands. Nay, thank me not, good Giles,' quo' she, 'but my good mother. And I do thank thee for giving of me somewhat to do for her memory.' And doesn't she fall a-weeping for her mother? And doesn't that set me off a-snivelling for my good brother that I love so dear, and to think that a poor little elf like me could yet speak in the ear of princes, and make my beautiful brother Vicar of Gouda; eh, lass, it is a bonny place, and a bonny manse, and hawthorn in every bush at spring-tide, and dog-roses and eglantine in every summer hedge. I know what the poor fool affects, leave that to me."

The dwarf began his narrative strutting to and fro before Margaret, but he ended it in her arms; for she could not contain herself, but caught him, and embraced him warmly. "Oh, Giles," she said, blushing, and kissing him, "I cannot keep my hands off thee, thy body it is so little, and thy heart so great. Thou art his true friend. Bless thee! bless thee! bless thee! Now we shall see him again. We have not set eyes on him since that terrible day."

"Gramercy, but that is strange," said Giles. "Maybe he is ashamed of having cursed those two vagabones, being our own flesh and blood, worse luck."



"Think you that is why he hides?" said Margaret eagerly.

"Ay, if he is hiding at all. However, I'll cry him by bell-man."

"Nay, that might much offend him."

"What care I? Is Gouda to go vicarless, and the manse in nettles?"

And to Margaret's secret satisfaction, Giles had the new vicar cried in Rotterdam and the neighbouring towns. He easily persuaded Margaret that in a day or two Gerard would be sure to hear, and come to his benefice. She went to look at his manse, and thought how comfortable it might be made for him, and how dearly she should love to do it.

But the days rolled on, and Gerard came neither to Rotterdam nor Gouda. Giles was mortified, Margaret indignant, and very wretched. She said to herself, "Thinking me dead, he comes home, and now, because I am alive, he goes back to Italy, for that is where he has gone." Joan advised her to consult the hermit of Gouda.

"Why, sure he is dead by this time."

"Yon one, belike. But the cave is never long void; Gouda ne'er wants a hermit."

But Margaret declined to go again to Gouda on such an errand. "What can he know, shut up in a cave? less than I, belike. Gerard hath gone back t' Italy. He hates me for not being dead."

Presently a Tergovian came in with a word from Catherine that Ghysbrecht Van Swieten had seen Gerard later than any one else. On this Margaret determined to go and see the house and goods that had been left her, and take Reicht Heynes home to Rotterdam. And, as may be supposed, her steps took her first to Ghysbrecht's house. She found him in his garden, seated in a chair with wheels. He greeted her with a feeble voice, but cordially; and



when she asked him whether it was true he had seen Gerard since the fifth of August, he replied, "Gerard no more, but Friar Clement. Ay, I saw him; and blessed be the day he entered my house."

He then related in his own words his interview with Clement. He told her, moreover, that the friar had afterwards acknowledged he came to Tergou with the missing deed in his bosom on purpose to make him disgorge her land; but that finding him disposed towards penitence, he had gone to work the other way.

"Was not this a saint; who came to right thee, but must needs save his enemy's soul in the doing it?"

To her question, whether he had recognised him, he said, "I ne'er suspected such a thing. 'Twas only when he had been three days with me that he revealed himself. Listen, while I speak my shame and his praise.

"I said to him, 'The land is gone home, and my stomach feels lighter; but there is another fault that clingeth to me still;' then told I him of the letter I had writ at request of his brethren—I whose place it was to check them. Said I, 'Yon letter was writ to part two lovers, and the devil aiding, it hath done the foul work. Land and houses I can give back, but yon mischief is done for ever.' 'Nay,' quoth he, 'not for ever, but for life. Repent it then while thou livest.' 'I shall,' said I, 'but how can God forgive it? I would not,' said I, 'were I He.'

"Yet will He certainly forgive it,' quoth he; 'for He is ten times more forgiving than I am, and I forgive thee.' I stared at him; and then he said softly but quavering like, 'Ghysbrecht, look at me closer. I am Gerard, the son of Eli.' And I looked, and looked, and at last, lo! it was Gerard. Verily I had fallen at his feet with shame and contrition, but he would not suffer me. 'That became not mine years and his, for a particular fault. I say not I for-

give thee without a struggle,' said he, 'not being a saint. But these three days thou hast spent in penitence, I have worn under thy roof in prayer; and I do forgive thee.' Those were his very words."

Margaret's tears began to flow, for it was in a broken and contrite voice the old man told her this unexpected trait in her Gerard. He continued, "And even with that he bade me farewell.

"My work here is done now,' said he. I had not the heart to stay him; for let him forgive me ever so, the sight of me must be wormwood to him. He left me in peace, and may a dying man's blessing wait on him, go where he will. Oh, girl, when I think of his wrongs and thine, and how he hath avenged himself by saving this stained soul of mine, my heart is broken with remorse, and these old eyes shed tears by night and day."

"Ghysbrecht," said Margaret, weeping; "since he hath forgiven thee, I forgive thee too: what is done, is done; and thou hast let me know this day that which I had walked the world to hear. But oh, burgomaster, thou art an understanding man, now help a poor woman, which hath forgiven thee her misery."

She then told him all that had befallen. "And," said she, "they will not keep the living for him for ever. He bids fair to lose that, as well as break all our hearts."

"Call my servant," cried the burgomaster, with sudden vigour. He sent him for a table and writing materials, and dictated letters to the burgomasters in all the principal towns in Holland, and one to a Prussian authority, his friend. His clerk and Margaret wrote them, and he signed them. "There," said he, "the matter shall be despatched throughout Holland by trusty couriers, and as far as Basle in Switzerland; and fear not, but we will soon have the Vicar of Gouda to his village."

She went home animated with fresh hopes, and accusing herself of ingratitude to Gerard. "I value my wealth now," said she.

She also made a resolution never to blame his conduct till she should hear from his own lips his reason.

Not long after her return from Tergou a fresh disaster befell. Catherine, I must premise, had secret interviews with the black sheep the very day after they were expelled; and Cornelis followed her to Tergou, and lived there on secret contributions; but Sybrandt chose to remain in Rotterdam. Ere Catherine left, she asked Margaret to lend her two gold angels. "For," said she, "all mine are spent." Margaret was delighted to lend them or give them; but the words were scarce out of her mouth ere she caught a look of regret and distress on Kate's face, and she saw directly whither her money was going. She gave Catherine the money, and went and shut herself up with her boy. Now this money was to last Sybrandt till his mother could make some good excuse for visiting Rotterdam again, and then she would bring the idle dog some of her own industrious scrapings.

*Not long afterwards Margaret was passing the inn frequented by Sybrandt when she saw him being carried by his boon companions. In a drunken frolic he tried to walk along the edge of a roof (a thing he had frequently done when sober), when he lost his footing and fell.*

When they came to pick him up he could not stand, but fell down giggling at each attempt.

On this they went staggering and roaring down the street with him, and carried him at great risk of another fall to the shop in the Hoog Straet. For he had babbled his own shame all over the place.

As soon as he saw Margaret he hiccuped out, "Here is the doctor that cures all hurts, a bonny lass." He also

bade her observe he bore her no malice, for he was paying her a visit sore against his will. "Wherefore, prithee send away these drunkards, and let you and 'me have t'other glass, to drown all unkindness."

All this time Margaret was pale and red by turns at sight of her enemy and at his insolence; but one of the men whispered what had happened, and a streaky something in Sybrandt's face arrested her attention.

"And he cannot stand up, say you?"

"A couldn't just now. Try, comrade! Be a man now!"

"I am a better man than thou," roared Sybrandt. "I'll stand up and fight ye all for a crown."

He started to his feet, and instantly rolled into his attendant's arms with a piteous groan. He then began to curse his boon companions, and declare they had stolen away his legs. "He could feel nothing below the waist."

"Alas, poor wretch," said Margaret. She turned very gravely to the men, and said, "Leave him here. And if you have brought him to this, go on your knees, for you have spoiled him for life. He will never walk again; his back is broken."

The drunken man caught these words, and the foolish look of intoxication fled, and a glare of anguish took its place. "The curse," he groaned; "the curse!"

Margaret and Reicht Heynes carried him carefully, and laid him on the softest bed.

Her opinion was verified. Sybrandt's spine was fatally injured; and he lay groaning and helpless, fed and tended by her he had so deeply injured.

The news was sent to Tergou, and Catherine came over.

It was a terrible blow to her. Moreover, she accused herself as the cause. "Oh, false wife; oh, weak mother," she cried. "I am rightly punished for my treason to my poor Eli."

She sat for hours at a time by his bedside rocking herself in silence, and was never quite herself again ; and the first gray hairs began to come in her poor head from that hour.

As for Sybrandt, all his cry was now for Gerard. He used to whine to Margaret like a suffering hound. "Oh, sweet Margaret, oh, bonny Margaret, for our Lady's sake find Gerard, and bid him take his curse off me. Thou art gentle, thou art good ; thou wilt entreat for me, and he will refuse thee nought." Catherine shared his belief that Gerard could cure him, and joined her entreaties to his. Margaret hardly needed this. The burgomaster and his agents having failed, she employed her own, and spent money like water. And among these agents poor Luke enrolled himself. She met him one day looking very thin, and spoke to him compassionately. On this he began to blubber, and say "he was more miserable than ever ; he would like to be good friends again upon almost any terms."

"Dear heart," said Margaret sorrowfully, "why can you not say to yourself, now I am her little brother, and she is my old, married sister, worn down with care ? Say so, and I will indulge thee, and pet thee, and make thee happier than a prince."

"Well, I will," said Luke savagely, "sooner than keep away from you altogether. But above all give me something to do. Perchance I may have better luck this time."

"Get me my marriage lines," said Margaret, turning sad and gloomy in a moment.

"That is as much as to say, get me *him* ! for where they are, he is."

"Not so. He may refuse to come nigh me ; but certes he will not deny a poor woman, who loved him once, her lines of betrothal. How can she go without them into any honest man's house ?"

"I'll get them you if they are in Holland," said Luke.



"They are as like to be in Rome," replied Margaret.

"Let us begin with Holland," observed Luke prudently.

The slave of love was furnished with money by his soft tyrant, and wandered hither and thither, cooperating, and carpentering, and looking for Gerard. "I can't be worse if I find the vagabone," said he, "and I may be a hantle better."

Luke Peterson was always asking Margaret what he could do for her. The answer used to be in a sad tone, "Nothing, Luke, nothing."

"What, you that are so clever, can you think of nothing for me to do for you?"

"Nothing, Luke, nothing."

But at last she varied the reply thus: "If you could make something to help my sweet sister Kate about."

The slave of love consented joyfully, and soon made Kate a little cart, and cushioned it, and yoked himself into it, and at eventide drew her out of the town, and along the pleasant boulevard, with Margaret and Catherine walking beside. It looked a happier party than it was.

Kate, for one, enjoyed it keenly, for little Gerard was put in her lap, and she doted on him; and it was like a cherub carried by a little angel, or a rosebud lying in the cup of a lily.

So the vulgar jeered; and asked Luke how a thistle tasted, and if his mistress could not afford one with four legs, etc.

Luke did not mind these jeers; but Kate minded them for him.

"Thou hast made the cart for me, good Luke," said she. "'Twas much. I did ill to let thee draw me too; we can afford to pay some poor soul for that. I love my rides and to carry little Gerard; But I'd liever ride no more than thou be mocked for't."



"Much I care for their tongues," said Luke; "if I did care I'd knock their heads together. I shall draw you till my mistress says give over."

"Luke, if you obey Kate, you will oblige me."

"Then I will obey Kate."

An honourable exception to popular humour was Jorian Ketel's wife. "That is strength well laid out, to draw the weak. And her prayers will be your guerdon; she is not long for this world; she smileth in pain."

Single-minded Luke answered that he did not want the poor lass's prayers: he did it to please his mistress, Margaret.

After that Luke often pressed Margaret to give him something to do—without success.

But one day, as if tired with his importuning, she turned on him, and said, with a look and accent I should in vain try to convey—

"Find me my boy's father."

### CHAPTER XXX

"MISTRESS, they all say he is dead."

"Not so. They feed me still with hopes."

"Ay, to your face, but behind your back they all say he is dead."

At this revelation Margaret's tears began to flow.

Luke whimpered for company. He had the body of a man, but the heart of a girl.

"Prithee, weep not so, sweet mistress," said he. "I'd bring him back to life an I could, rather than see thee weep so sore."

Margaret said she thought she was weeping because they were so double-tongued with her.

She recovered herself, and laying her hand on his shoulder, said solemnly, "Luke, he is not dead. Dying men are known to have a strange sight. And listen, Luke! My poor father, when he was a-dying, and I, simple fool, was so happy, thinking he was going to get well altogether, he said to mother and me—he was sitting in that very chair where you are now, and mother was as might be here, and I was yonder making a sleeve—said he, 'I see him! I see him!' Just so. Not like a failing man at all, but all o' fire. 'Sore disfigured—on a great river—coming this way.'

"Ah, Luke, if you were a woman, and had the feeling for me you think you have, you would pity me, and find him for me. Take a thought! The father of my child!"

"Alack, I would if I knew how," said Luke. "But how can I?"

"Nay, of course you cannot. I am mad to think it. But oh, if anyone really cared for me, they *would*; that is all I know."

Luke reflected in silence for some time.

"The old folk all say dying men can see more than living wights. Let me think; for my mind cannot gallop like thine. On a great river! Well, the Maas is a great river." He pondered on.

"Coming this way? Then if 'twas the Maas, he would have been here by this time, so 'tis not the Maas. The Rhine is a great river, greater than the Maas; and very long. I think it will be the Rhine."

"And so do I, Luke; for Denys bade him come down the Rhine. But even if it is, he may turn off before he comes anigh his birthplace. He does not pine for me as I for him; that is clear. Luke, do you not think he has deserted me?" She wanted him to contradict her, but he said, "It looks very like it; what a fool he must be!"

"What do we know?" objected Margaret imploringly.

"Let me think again," said Luke. "I cannot gallop."

The result of this meditation was this. He knew a station about sixty miles up the Rhine, where all the public boats put in; and he would go to that station, and try and cut the truant off. To be sure he did not even know him by sight; but as each boat came in he would mingle with the passengers, and ask if one Gerard was there. "And, mistress, if you were to give me a bit of a letter to him; for, with us being strangers, mayhap a won't believe a word I say."

"Good, kind, thoughtful Luke, I will (how I have undervalued thee!). But give me till supper-time to get it writ." At supper she put a letter into his hand with a blush; it was a long letter, tied round with silk after the fashion of the day, and sealed over the knot.

Luke weighed it in his hand, with a shade of discontent, and said to her very gravely, "Say your father was not dreaming, and say I have the luck to fall in with this man, and say he should turn out a better bit of stuff than I think him, and come home to you then and there—what is to become o' me?"

Margaret coloured to her very brow. "Oh, Luke, Heaven will reward thee. And I shall fall on my knees and bless thee; and I shall love thee all my days, sweet Luke, as a mother does her son. I am so old by thee: trouble ages the heart. Thou shalt not go: 'tis not fair of me. Love maketh us to be all self."

"Humph!" said Luke. "And if," resumed he, in the same grave way, "yon scapegrace shall read thy letter, and hear me tell him how thou pinest for him, and yet, being a traitor, or a mere idiot, will not turn to thee—what shall become of me then? Must I die a bachelor, and thou fare lonely to thy grave, neither maid, wife, nor widow?"

Margaret panted with fear and emotion at this terrible piece of good sense, and the plain question that followed it. But at last she faltered out, "If, which our Lady be merciful to me, and forbid—oh!"

"Well, mistress?"

"If he should read my letter, and hear thy words—and, sweet Luke, be just and tell him what a lovely babe he hath, fatherless, fatherless. Oh, Luke, can he be so cruel?"

"I trow not; but if?"

"Then he will give thee up my marriage lines, and I shall be an honest woman, and a wretched one; and, of course, then I *could* go into any honest man's house that would be troubled with me, and even for thy goodness this day, I will—I will—ne'er be so ungrateful as go past thy door to another man's."

"Ay, but will you come in at mine? Answer me that!"

"Oh, ask me not! Some day, perhaps, when my wounds leave bleeding. Alas, I'll try. If I don't fling myself and my child into the Maas. Do not go, Luke! do not think of going! 'Tis all madness from first to last."

But Luke was as slow to forego an idea as to form one.

His reply showed how fast love was making a man of him. "Well," said he, "madness is something, anyway; and I am tired of doing nothing for thee; and I am no great talker. To-morrow, at peep of day, I start. But hold, I have no money. My mother, she takes care of all mine; and I ne'er see it again."

Then Margaret took out Catherine's gold angel, which had escaped so often, and gave it to Luke; and he set out on his mad errand.

It did not, however, seem so mad to him as to us. It was a superstitious age; and Luke acted on the dying man's dream, or vision, or illusion, or whatever it was, much as we should act on respectable information.

But Catherine was downright angry when she heard of it. To send the poor lad on such a wild-goose chase! "But you are like a many more girls; and mark my words: by the time you have worn that Luke fairly out, and made him as sick of you as a dog, you will turn as fond on him as a cow on a calf, and 'Too late' will be the cry."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### The Hearth

WRITING an earnest letter seldom leaves the mind *in statu quo*. Margaret, in hers, vented her energy and her faith in her dying father's vision, or illusion; and when this was done, and Luke gone, she wondered at her credulity, and her conscience pricked her about Luke; and Catherine came and scolded her, and she paid the price of false hopes, and elevation of spirits, by falling into deeper despondency. She was found in this state by a stanch friend she had lately made—Joan Ketel. This good woman came in radiant with an idea.

"Margaret, I know the cure for thine ill: the hermit of Gouda, a wondrous holy man. Why, he can tell what is coming, when he is in the mood."

"Ay, I have heard of him," said Margaret hopelessly. Joan with some difficulty persuaded her to walk out as far as Gouda, and consult the hermit. They took some butter and eggs in a basket, and went to his cave.

What had made the pair such fast friends? Jorian some six weeks ago fell ill; it began with raging pain; and when this went off, leaving him weak, an awkward symptom succeeded; nothing, either liquid or solid, would stay in his stomach a minute. The doctor said: "He must die if this goes on many hours; therefore, boil thou now a



chicken with a golden angel in the water, and let him sup that!" Alas! Gilt chicken broth shared the fate of the humbler viands, its predecessors. Then the curé steeped the thumb of St. Sergius in beef broth. Same result. Then Joan ran weeping to Margaret to borrow some linen to make his shroud. "Let me see him," said Margaret. She came in and felt his pulse. "Ah!" said she, "I doubt they have not gone to the root. Open the window! Art stifling him; now change all his linen."

"Alack, woman, what for? Why foul more linen for a dying man?" objected the mediæval wife.

"Do as thou art bid," said Margaret dully, and left the room.

Joan somehow found herself doing as she was bid. Margaret returned with her apron full of a flowering herb. She made a decoction, and took it to the bedside; and before giving it to the patient, took a spoonful herself, and smacked her lips hypocritically. "That is fair," said he, with a feeble attempt at humour. "Why, 'tis sweet, and now 'tis bitter." She engaged him in conversation as soon as he had taken it. This bitter-sweet stayed by him. Seeing which she built on it as cards are built: mixed a very little schiedam in the third spoonful, and a little beaten yoke of egg in the seventh. And so with the patience of her sex she coaxed his body out of Death's grasp; and finally, Nature, being patted on the back, instead of kicked under the bed, set Jorian Ketel on his legs again. But the doctress made them both swear never to tell a soul her guilty deed. "They would put me in prison, away from my child."

The simple that saved Jorian was called sweet feverfew. She gathered it in his own garden. Her eagle eye had seen it growing out of the window.

Margaret and Joan, then, reached the hermit's cave, and



placed their present on the little platform. Margaret then applied her mouth to the aperture, made for that purpose, and said: "Holy hermit, we bring thee butter and eggs of the best; and I, a poor deserted girl, wife, yet no wife, and mother of the sweetest babe, come to pray thee tell me whether he is quick or dead, true to his vows or false."

A faint voice issued from the cave: "Trouble me not with the things of earth, but send me a holy friar. I am dying."

"Alas!" cried Margaret. "Is it e'en so, poor soul? Then let us in to help thee."

"Saints forbid! Thine is a woman's voice. Send me a holy friar."

They went back as they came. Joan could not help saying, "Are women imps o' darkness, then, that they must not come anigh a dying bed?"

But Margaret was too deeply dejected to say anything. Joan applied rough consolation. But she was not listened to till she said: "And Jorian will speak out ere long; he is just on the boil. He is very grateful to thee, believe it."

"Seeing is believing," replied Margaret, with quiet bitterness.

"Not but what he thinks you might have saved him with something more out o' the common than yon. 'A man of my inches to be cured wi' feverfew,' says he. 'Why, if there is a sorry herb,' says he. 'Why, I was thinking o' pulling all mine up,' says he. I up and told him remedies were none the better for being far-fetched; you and feverfew cured him, when the grand medicines came up faster than they went down. So says I, 'You may go down on your four bones to feverfew.' But indeed, he is grateful at bottom; you are all his thought and all his chat. But he sees Gerard's folk coming around ye, and good friends, and he said only last night——"

"Well?"

"He made me vow not to tell ye."

"Prithee, tell me."

"Well, he said: 'An if I tell what little I know, it won't bring him back, and it will set them all by the ears. I wish I had more headpiece,' said he; 'I am sore perplexed. But least said is soonest mended.' Yon' is his favourite word: he comes back to't from a mile off."

Margaret shook her head. "Ay, we are wading in deep waters, my poor babe and me."

The months rolled on, and Sybrandt improved in spirit, but not in body; he was Margaret's pensioner for life.

*Meanwhile no vicar appeared for Gouda.*

And the people petitioned the Duke for a vicar, a real vicar. "Ours cometh never nigh us," said they, "this six months past; our children they die unchristened, and our folk unburied, except by some chance comer." Giles's influence baffled this just complaint once; but a second petition was prepared, and he gave Margaret little hope that the present position could be maintained a single day. So then Margaret went sorrowfully to the pretty manse to see it for the last time, ere it should pass for ever into a stranger's hands.

"I think he would have been happy here," she said, and turned heart-sick away.

"Oh, Giles," said she, "ask for another month. They will give thee another month, maybe."

He returned in an hour to tell her he could not get a month. "They have given me a week," said he. "And what is a week?"

"Drowning bodies catch at strawen," was her reply. "A week? a little week?"

*At this time all began to talk of the new hermit of Gouda, and Reicht went to his cell. When she returned she said:*

"Margaret, the hermit did speak to me."

"What, a hermit there? among all those birds?"

"Ay; and doth not that show him a holy man?"

"I' God's name, what said he to thee, Reicht?"

"Alas! Margaret, I told him thy story, and I prayed him for our Lady's sake to tell me where thy Gerard is. And I waited long for an answer, and presently a voice came like a trumpet: 'Pray for the soul of Gerard, the son of Eli!'"

"Ah!"

"Oh, woe is me that I have this to tell thee, sweet Margaret! bethink thee thou hast thy boy to live for yet."

"Let me go home," said Margaret faintly.

*Margaret resolved herself to go to this new hermit—but she told no one.*

She went to work on a scale that never occurred to either of them. She was determined to see the hermit, and question him face to face, not through a wall. She found that by making a circuit she could get above the cave, and look down without being seen by the solitary. But when she came to do it, she found an impenetrable mass of brambles. After tearing her clothes, and her hands and feet, so that she was soon covered with blood, the resolute, patient girl took out her scissors and steadily snipped and cut till she made a narrow path through the enemy. But so slow was the work that she had to leave it half done. The next day she had her scissors fresh ground, and brought a sharp knife as well, and gently, silently, cut her way to the roof of the cave. There she made an ambush of some of the cut brambles, so that the passers-by might not see her, and couched with watchful eye till the hermit should come out. She heard him move underneath her. But he never left his cell. She began to think it was true that he only came out at night. The

next day she came early and brought a jerkin she was making for little Gerard, and there she sat all day, working, and watching with dogged patience.

At four o'clock the birds began to feed; and a great many of the smaller kinds came fluttering round the cave, and one or two went in. But most of them, taking a preliminary seat on the bushes, suddenly discovered Margaret, and went off with an agitated flirt of their little wings. And although they sailed about in the air, they would not enter the cave. Presently, to encourage them, the hermit, all unconscious of the cause of their tremors, put out a thin, white hand with a few crumbs in it. Margaret laid down her work softly, and gliding her body forward like a snake, looked down at it from above; it was but a few feet from her. It was as the woman described it, a thin, white hand.

Presently the other hand came out with a piece of bread, and the two hands together broke it and scattered the crumbs. But that other hand had hardly been out two seconds ere the violet eyes that were watching above dilated; and the gentle bosom heaved, and the whole frame quivered like a leaf in the wind.

*She had seen the mole on the thin white hand, exactly like the mole on baby Gerard's. Her search was successful.*

The night seemed to have done wonders for her.

She came to Catherine, who was sitting sighing by the fireside, and kissed her, and said—

“Mother, what would you like best in the world?”

“Eh, dear,” replied Catherine despondently, “I know nought that would make me smile now; I have parted from too many that were dear to me. Gerard lost again as soon as found; Kate in heaven; and Sybrandt down for life.”

“Poor mother! Mother dear, Gouda manse is to be furnished, and cleaned, and made ready all in a hurry.

See, here be ten gold angels. Make them go far, good mother; for I have ta'en over many already from my boy for a set of useless loons that were aye going to find him for me."

Catherine and Reicht stared at her a moment in silence, and then out burst a flood of questions, to none of which would she give a reply.

"Nay," said she, "I have lain on my bed and thought, and thought, and thought, whiles you were all sleeping; and methinks I have got the clue to all. I love you, dear mother; but I'll trust no woman's tongue. If I fail this time, I'll have none to blame but Margaret Brandt."

A resolute woman is a very resolute thing. And there was a deep, dogged determination in Margaret's voice and brow that at once convinced Catherine it would be idle to put any more questions at that time. She and Reicht lost themselves in conjectures; and Catherine whispered Reicht—

"Bide quiet, then 'twill leak out;" a shrewd piece of advice, founded on general observation.

Within an hour Catherine was on the road to Gouda in a cart, with two stout girls to help her, and quite a siege artillery of mops, and pails, and brushes. She came back with heightened colour, and something of the old sparkle in her eye, and kissed Margaret with a silent warmth that spoke volumes, and at five in the morning was off again to Gouda. That night, as Reicht was in her first sleep, a hand gently pressed her shoulder, and she awoke, and was going to scream.

"Whist," said Margaret, and put her finger to her lips. She then whispered, "Rise softly, don thy habits, and come with me!"

When she came down, Margaret begged her to loose Dragon and bring him along. Now Dragon was a great



mastiff, who had guarded Margaret Van Eyck and Reicht, two lone women, for some years, and was devotedly attached to the latter.

Margaret and Reicht went out, with Dragon walking majestically behind them. They came back long after midnight, and retired to rest. Catherine never knew.

Margaret read her friends: she saw the sturdy, faithful Frisian could hold her tongue, and Catherine could not. Yet I am not sure she would have trusted even Reicht had her nerve equalled her spirit; but with all her daring and resolution, she was a tender, timid woman, a little afraid of the dark, very afraid of being alone in it, and desperately afraid of wolves. Now Dragon could kill a wolf in a brace of shakes; but then Dragon would not go with her, but only with Reicht; so altogether she made one confidante.

The next night they made another moonlight reconnaissance, and as I think, with some result. For not the next night (it rained that night and extinguished their courage), but the next after they took with them a companion, the last in the world Reicht Heynes would have thought of; yet she gave her warm approval as soon as she was told he was to go with them.

Imagine how these stealthy assailants trembled and panted when the moment of action came; imagine, if you can, the tumult in Margaret's breast, the thrilling hopes, chasing, and chased by sickening fears; the strange and perhaps unparalleled mixture of tender familiarity and distant awe with which a lovely and high-spirited, but tender, adoring woman, wife in the eye of the Law, and no wife in the eye of the Church, trembling, blushing, paling, glowing, shivering, stole at night, noiseless as the dew, upon the hermit of Gouda.

And the stars above seemed never so bright and calm.



## CHAPTER XXXII

ONE night, a beautiful clear frosty night, he came back to his cell, after a short rest. The stars were wonderful. Heaven seemed a thousand times larger as well as brighter than earth, and to look with a thousand eyes instead of one.

And he entered his cave rapidly, and began with somewhat nervous expedition to light one of his largest tapers. While he was lighting it, there was a soft sigh in the cave.

He started and dropped the candle just as it was lighting, and it went out.

He stooped for it hurriedly and lighted it, listening intently. When it was lighted he shaded it with his hand from behind, and threw the faint light all round the cell.

In the farthest corner the outline of the wall seemed broken. He took a step towards the place with his heart beating. The candle at the same time getting brighter, he saw it was the figure of a woman. Another step with his knees knocking together. It was Margaret Brandt.

"What," he gasped, shaking over her, "And is it thou? Alas!" And they were both choked with emotion, and could not speak for a while.

"Ay, Gerard. I am come to take thee to thy pretty vicarage: art Vicar of Gouda, thanks to Heaven and thy good brother Giles; and mother and I have made it so neat for thee, Gerard. 'Tis well enow in winter I promise thee. But bide a bit till the hawthorn bloom, and anon thy walls put on their kirtle of brave roses, and sweet woodbine. Have we forgotten thee, and the foolish things thou lovest? And, dear Gerard, thy mother is waiting; and 'tis late for her to be out of bed: prithee, prithee, come! And the moment we are out of this foul hole I'll show thee a treasure thou hast gotten, and knowest nought on't, or sure hadst never fled from us so. 'Alas! what is

to do? What have I ignorantly said, to be regarded thus?" For he had drawn himself all up into a heap, and was looking at her with a strange gaze of fear and suspicion blended.

"My beloved," said he, with a strange mixture of tenderness and dogged resolution, "I bless thee for giving me one more sight of thy sweet face, and may God forgive thee, and bless thee, for destroying in a minute the holy peace it hath taken six months of solitude to build. No matter. A year of penance will, *Dei gratiâ*, restore me to my calm. My poor Margaret, I seem cruel: yet I am kind: 'tis best we part; ay, this moment."

"Part, Gerard? Never: we have seen what comes of parting. Part? Why, you have not heard half my story; no, nor the tithe. 'Tis not for thy mere comfort I take thee to Gouda manse. Hear me!"

"I may not. Thy very voice is a temptation with its music, memory's delight."

"But I say you shall hear me, Gerard, for forth this place I go not unheard."

"Then must we part by other means," said Clement sadly.

He made to the door, and had actually opened it and got half out, when she darted after and caught him by the arm.

"Nay, then another must speak for me. I thought to reward thee for yielding to me; but unkind that thou art, I need his help I find; turn then this way one moment."

"Nay, nay."

"But I say, ay! And then turn thy back on us an thou canst." She somewhat relaxed her grasp, thinking he would never deny her so small a favour. But at this he saw his opportunity and seized it.

"Fly, Clement, fly!" he almost shrieked; and his religious enthusiasm giving him for a moment his old strength,

he burst wildly away from her, and after a few steps bounded over the little stream and ran beside it, but finding he was not followed, stopped, and looked back.

She was lying on her face, with her hands spread out.

Yes, without meaning it, he had thrown her down and hurt her. When he saw that, he groaned and turned back a step. Margaret uttered one long, piteous moan, and rose to her knees. He saw her as plain almost as in midday. Saw her pale face and her eyes glistening; and then in the still night he heard these words:—

“O God! Thou that knowest all, Thou seest how I am used. Forgive me, then! For I will not live another day.” With this she suddenly started to her feet, and flew like some wild creature, wounded to death, close by his miserable hiding-place, shrieking: “Cruel!—cruel!—cruel!—cruel!”

Margaret, when she ran past Gerard, was almost mad.

“Oh, Reicht!” moaned the despised beauty, as soon as she could utter a word for choking, “see how he has served me;” and she showed her hands, that were bleeding with falling on the stony ground.

“Mistress Margaret!” said Reicht quietly, “take a fool’s advice that loves ye. Go softly to yon cave, wi’ all the ears and eyes your mother ever gave you.”

“Why?—what—Reicht?” stammered Margaret.

“I thought the cave was afire, ’twas so light inside; and there were voices.”

“Voices?”

“Ay, not one, but twain, and all unlike—a man’s and a little child’s, talking as pleasant as you and me.”

He kneeled down and prayed God humbly to release him that very night from the burden of the flesh. Then he lighted all his candles, and recited his Psalter doggedly; each word seemed to come like a lump of lead from a

leaden heart, and to fall leaden to the ground; and in this mechanical office every now and then he moaned with all his soul. In the midst of which he suddenly observed a little bundle in the corner he had not seen before in the feebler light, and at one end of it something like gold spun into silk. He went to see what it could be; and he had no sooner viewed it closer, than he threw up his hands with rapture. "It is a seraph," he whispered, "a lovely seraph. Heaven hath witnessed my bitter trial, and approves my cruelty; and this flower of the skies is sent to cheer me, fainting under my burden."

He fell on his knees, and gazed with ecstasy on its golden hair, and its tender skin, and cheeks like a peach.

"Let me feast my sad eyes on thee ere thou leavest me for thine ever-blessed abode, and my cell darkens again at thy parting, as it did at hers."

With all this, the hermit disturbed the lovely visitor. He opened wide two eyes, the colour of heaven; and seeing a strange figure kneeling over him, he cried piteously, "Mum—ma! Mum—ma!" And the tears began to run down his little cheeks. Perhaps, after all, Clement, who for more than six months had not looked on the human face divine, estimated childish beauty more justly than we can; and in truth, this fair northern child, with its long golden hair, was far more angelic than any of our imagined angels. But now the spell was broken.

"Now bless thee, bless thee, bless thee, sweet innocent. I would not change thee for e'en a cherub in heaven.

*"Fret not, sweetheart; tell me thy pretty name?"*

"Baby." And he opened his eyes with amazement at this great hulking creature's ignorance.

"And now I put on my best pelisse, in honour of thy worshipful visit. See how soft and warm it is; bless the good soul that sent it; and now I sit me down; so. And

I take thee on my left knee, and put my arm under thy little head ; so. And then the psaltery, and play a little tune ; so, not too loud."

"I ikes dat."

"I am right glad on't. Now list the story."

He chanted a child's story in a sort of recitative, singing a little moral refrain now and then. The boy listened with rapture.

But Nature suddenly held out her leaden sceptre over the youthful eyelids. "I is not eepy," whined he very faintly, and succumbed.

Clement laid down his psaltery softly and began to rock his new treasure in his arms, and to crone over him a little lullaby well known in Tergou, with which his own mother had often set him off. And the child sank into a profound sleep upon his arm. And he stopped croning, and gazed on him with infinite tenderness, yet sadness ; for at that moment he could not help thinking what might have been but for a piece of paper with a lie in it.

He sighed deeply. The next moment the moonlight burst into his cell, and with it, and in it, and almost as swift as it, Margaret Brandt was down at his knee with a timorous hand upon his shoulder.

"Gerard, you do not reject us. You cannot."

### CHAPTER XXXIII

THE startled hermit glared from his nursling to Margaret and from her to him, in amazement, equalled only by his agitation at her so unexpected return. The child lay asleep on his left arm, and she was at his right knee ; no longer the pale, scared, panting girl he had overpowered so easily an hour or two ago, but an imperial beauty, with blush-



ing cheeks and sparkling eyes, and lips sweetly parted in triumph, and her whole face radiant with a look he could not quite read; for he had never yet seen it on her; maternal pride. He stared and stared from the child to her, in throbbing amazement.

"Us?" he gasped at last. And still his wonder-stricken eyes turned to and fro.

Margaret was surprised in her turn. It was an age of impressions, not facts. "What!" she cried, "doth not a father know his own child? and a man of God, too? Fie, Gerard, to pretend! nay, thou art too wise, too good, not to have—why, I watched thee; and e'en now look at you twain! 'Tis thine own flesh and blood thou holdest to thine heart."

Clement trembled. "What words are these," he stammered; "this angel mine?"

"Whose else? since he is mine."

Clement turned on the sleeping child, with a look beyond the power of the pen to describe, and trembling all over, as his eyes seemed to absorb the little love.

Margaret's eyes followed his. "He is not a bit like me," said she proudly; "but oh, at whiles he is thy very image in little; and see this golden hair. Thine was the very colour at this age; ask mother else. And see this mole on his little finger; now look at thine own; there! 'Twas thy mother let me weet thou wast marked so before him; and oh, Gerard, 'twas this our child found thee for me; for by that little mark on thy finger I knew thee for his father, when I watched above thy window, and saw thee feed the birds." Here she seized the child's hand, and kissed it eagerly, and got half of it into her mouth, Heaven knows how. "Ay! bless thee, thou didst find thy poor daddy for her, and now thou hast made us friends



again after our little quarrel; the first, the last. Wast very cruel to me but now, my poor Gerard, and I forgive thee; for loving of thy child."

"Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!" sobbed Clement, choking.

And lowered by fasts, and unnerved by solitude, the once strong man was hysterical, and nearly fainting.

Margaret was alarmed, but having experience, her pity was greater than her fear. "Nay, take not on so," she murmured soothingly, and put a gentle hand upon his brow. "Be brave! So, so. Dear heart, thou art not the first man that has gone abroad and come back richer by a lovely little self than he went forth. Being a man of God, take courage, and say He sends thee this to comfort thee for what thou hast lost in me; and that is not so very much, my lamb; for sure the better part of love shall ne'er cool here to thee; though it may in thine, and ought, being a priest, and parson of Gouda."

"I? priest of Gouda? Never!" murmured Clement in a faint voice; "I am a friar of St. Dominic: yet speak on, sweet music, tell me all that has happened thee, before we are parted again." Now some would on this have exclaimed against parting at all, and raised the true question in dispute. But such women as Margaret do not repeat their mistakes. It is very hard to defeat them *twice*, where their hearts are set on a thing.

She assented, and turned her back on Gouda manse as a thing not to be recurred to; and she told him her tale, dwelling above all on the kindness to her of his parents; and while she related her troubles, his hand stole to hers, and often she felt him wince and tremble with ire, and often press her hand, sympathising with her in every vein.

"Oh, piteous tale of a true heart battling alone against such bitter odds," said he.



"THE STARTLED HERMIT GLARED FROM HIS NURSING  
TO MARGARET."



"Well," said she, "let that pass. Know that I have been sore affronted for want of my lines."

"Who hath dared affront thee?"

"No matter; those that will do it again if thou hast lost them, which the saints forbid."

"I lose them? nay, there they lie, close to thy hand."

"Where, where, oh, where?"

Clement hung his head. "Look in the Vulgate. Heaven forgive me: I thought thou wert dead, and a saint in heaven."

She looked, and on the blank leaves of the poor soul's Vulgate she found her marriage lines.

"Thank God!" she cried, "thank God! Oh, bless thee, Gerard, bless thee! Why, what is here, Gerard?"

On the other leaves were pinned every scrap of paper she had ever sent him, and their two names she had once written together in sport, and the lock of her hair she had given him, and half a silver coin she had broken with him, and a straw she had sucked her soup with the first day he ever saw her. When Margaret saw these proofs of love and signs of a gentle heart bereaved, even her exultation at getting back her marriage lines was overpowered by gushing tenderness. She almost staggered, and her hand went to her bosom, and she leaned her brow against the stone cell and wept so silently that he did not see she was weeping; indeed she would not let him, for she felt that to befriend him now she must be the stronger; and emotion weakens.

"Gerard," said she, "I know you are wise and good. You must have a reason for what you are doing, let it seem ever so unreasonable. Talk we like old friends. Why are you buried alive?"

"Margaret, to escape temptation. My impious ire against those two had its root in the heart; that heart then I must deaden, and, Dei gratiâ, I shall. Shall I,

a servant of Christ and of the Church, court temptation? Shall I pray daily to be led out on't, and walk into it with open eyes?"

"That is good sense anyway," said Margaret, with a consummate affectation of candour.

"'Tis unanswerable," said Clement, with a sigh.

"We shall see. Tell me, have you escaped temptation here? Why I ask is, when *I* am alone, my thoughts are far more wild and foolish than in company. Nay, speak sooth; come!"

"I must needs own I have been worse tempted here with evil imaginations than in the world."

"There, now."

"Ay, but so were Anthony and Jerome, Macarius and Hilarion, Benedict, Bernard, and all the saints. 'Twill wear off."

"How do you know?"

"I feel sure it will."

"Guessing against knowledge. Here 'tis men folk are sillier than us that be but women. Wise in their own conceits they will not let themselves see; their stomachs are too high to be taught by their eyes. A woman, if she went into a hole in a bank to escape temptation, and there found it, would just lift her farthingale and out on't, and not e'en know how wise she was, till she watched a man in like plight."

"Nay, I grant humility and a teachable spirit are the roads to wisdom; but when all is said, here I wrestle but with imagination. At Gouda, she I love as no priest or monk must love any but the angels, she will tempt a weak soul, unwilling, yet not loth to be tempted."

"Ay, that is another matter; *I* should tempt thee then? to what, i' God's name?"

"Who knows? The flesh is weak."



"Speak for yourself, my lad. Why, you are thinking of some other Margaret, not Margaret à Peter. Was ever my mind turned to folly and frailty? Stay, is it because you were my husband once, as these lines avouch? Think you the road to folly is beaten for you more than for another? Oh! how shallow are the wise, and how little able are you to read me, who can read you so well from tip to toe. Come, learn thine A B C."

And Margaret's eyes flashed fire, and her nostrils expanded, that it was glorious to see; and no one that did see her could doubt her sincerity.

"I had not the sense to see that," said Gerard quietly. And he pondered.

Margaret eyed him in silence, and soon recovered her composure. "Let not you and I dispute," said she gently; "speak we of other things. Ask me of thy folk."

• "My father?"

"Well, and warms to thee and me. Poor soul, a drew glaive on those twain that day, but Jorian Ketel and I we mastered him, and he drove them forth his house for ever."

"That may not be; he must take them back."

"That he will never do for us. You know the man; he is dour as iron; yet would he do it for one word from one that will not speak it."

"Who?"

"The Vicar of Gouda. The old man will be at the manse to-morrow, I hear."

"How you come back to that."

"Forgive me: I am but a woman. It is us for nagging; shouldst keep me from it wi' questioning of me."

"My sister Kate?"

"Alas!"

"What, hath ill befallen e'en that sweet lily? Out and alas!"



"Be calm, sweetheart, no harm hath her befallen. Oh, nay, nay, far fro' that." Then Margaret forced herself to be composed, and in a low, sweet, gentle voice she murmured to him thus: "My poor Gerard, Kate hath left her trouble behind her. For the manner on't, 'twas like the rest. Ah, such as she saw never thirty, nor ever shall while earth shall last. She smiled in pain too. A well, then, thus 'twas: she was took wi' a languor and a loss of all her pains."

"A loss of her pains? I understand you not."

"Ay, you are not experienced; indeed, e'en thy mother almost blinded herself, and said, 'Tis maybe a change for the better.' But Joan Ketel, which is an understanding woman, she looked at her and said, 'Down sun, down wind!' And the gossips sided, and said, 'Be brave, you that are her mother, for she is half way to the saints.' And thy mother wept sore, but Kate would not let her; and one very ancient woman, she said to thy mother, 'She will die as easy as she lived hard.' And she lay painless best part of three days, a-sipping of heaven aforehand. And, my dear, when she was just parting, she asked for 'Gerard's little boy,' and I brought him and set him on the bed, and the little thing behaved as peaceably as he does now. But by this time she was past speaking; but she pointed to a drawer, and her mother knew what to look for: it was two gold angels thou hadst given her years ago. Poor soul! she had kept them till thou shouldst come home. And she nodded towards the little boy, and looked anxious; but we understood her, and put the pieces in his two hands, and when his little fingers closed on them, she smiled content. And so she gave her little earthly treasures to her favourite's child—for you *were* her favourite—and her immortal jewel to God, and passed so sweetly we none of us knew justly when she left us. Well-a-day, well-a-day!"

Gerard wept.

"She hath not left her like on earth," he sobbed. "Oh, how the affections of earth curl softly round my heart! I cannot help it; God made them after all. Speak on, sweet Margaret; at thy voice the past rolls its tides back upon me; the loves and the hopes of youth come fair and gliding into my dark cell, and darker bosom, on waves of memory and music."

"Gerard, I am loth to grieve you, but Kate cried a little when she first took ill, at you not being there to close her eyes."

Gerard sighed.

"You were within a league, but hid your face from her."

He groaned.

"There, forgive me for nagging; I am but a woman: you would not have been so cruel to your own flesh and blood knowingly, would you?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, then, know that thy brother Sybrandt lies in my charge with a broken back, fruit of thy curse."

"Mea culpa! mea culpa!"

"He is very penitent; be yourself, and forgive him this night."

"I have forgiven him long ago."

"Think you he can believe that from any mouth but yours? Come! he is but about two butts' length hence."

"So near? Why, where?"

"At Gouda manse. I took him there yestreen. For I know you, the curse was scarce cold on your lips when you repented it" (Gerard nodded assent), "and I said to myself, Gerard will thank me for taking Sybrandt to die under his roof; he will not beat his breast and cry mea culpa, yet grudge three footsteps to quiet a withered brother on his last bed. He may have a bee in his bonnet, but he is not a hypocrite, a thing all pious words and uncharitable deeds."

Gerard literally staggered where he sat at this tremendous thrust.

"Forgive me for nagging," said she. "Thy mother too is waiting for thee. Is it well done to keep her on thorns so long? She will not sleep this night. Bethink thee, Gerard, she is all to thee that I am to this sweet child. Ah, I think so much more of mothers since I had my little Gerard. She suffered for thee, and nursed thee, and tended thee from boy to man. Priest, monk, hermit, call thyself what thou wilt, to her thou art but one thing, her child."

"Where is she?" murmured Gerard, in a quavering voice.

"At Gouda manse, wearing the night in prayer and care."

Then Margaret saw the time was come for that appeal to his reason she had purposely reserved till persuasion should have paved the way for conviction. So the smith first softens the iron by fire, and then brings down the sledge-hammer.

She showed him, but in her own good straightforward Dutch, that his present life was only a higher kind of selfishness, spiritual egotism; whereas a priest had no more right to care only for his own soul than only for his own body. That was not *his* path to heaven. "But," said she, "whoever yet lost his soul by saving the souls of others? the Almighty loves him who thinks of others; and when He shall see thee caring for the souls of the folk the Duke hath put into thine hand, He will care ten times more for thy soul than He does now."

Gerard was struck by this remark. "Art shrewd in dispute," said he.

"Far from it," was the reply, "only my eyes are not bandaged with conceit. So long as Satan walks the whole earth, tempting men, and so long as the sons of Belial do never lock themselves in caves, but run like ants, to and

fro, corrupting others, the good man that skulks apart plays the devil's game, or at least gives him, the odds: thou a soldier of Christ? Ask thy comrade Denys, who is but a soldier of the Duke, ask him if ever he skulked in a hole and shunned the battle because forsooth in battle is danger as well as glory and duty. For thy sole excuse is fear; thou makest no secret on't. Go to, no duke or king hath such cowardly soldiers as Christ hath. What was that you said in the church at Rotterdam, about the man in the parable that buried his talent in the earth, and so offended the giver? Thy wonderful gift for preaching, is it not a talent, and a gift from thy Creator?"

"Certes; such as it is."

"And hast thou laid it out? or buried it? To whom hast thou preached these seven months? to bats and owls? Hast buried it in one hole with thyself and thy once good wits.

"The Dominicans are the friars' preachers. 'Tis for preaching they were founded; so thou art false to Dominic as well as to his Master.

"Do you remember, Gerard, when we were young together, which now are old before our time, as we walked handed in the fields, did you but see a sheep cast, ay, three fields off, you would leave your sweetheart (by her good will) and run and lift the sheep for charity? Well, then, at Gouda is not one sheep in evil plight, but a whole flock; some cast, some strayed, some sick, some tainted, some a-being devoured, and all for the want of a shepherd. Where is their shepherd? lurking in a den like a wolf, a den in his own parish; out fie! out fie!

"I scented thee out, in part, by thy kindness to the little birds. Take note, you Gerard Eliassoen must love something, 'tis in your blood; you were born to't. Shunning man, you do but seek earthly affection a peg lower than man."

Gerard interrupted her. "The birds are God's creatures, His innocent creatures, and I do well to love them, being God's creatures."

"What, are they creatures of the same God that we are, that he is who lies upon thy knee?"

"You know they are."

"Then what pretence for shunning us and being kind to them? Sith man is one of the animals, why pick him out to shun? Is't because he is of animals the paragon? What, you court the young of birds, and abandon your own young? Birds need but bodily food, and, having wings, deserve scanty pity if they cannot fly and find it. But that sweet dove upon thy knee, he needeth not carnal only, but spiritual food. He is thine as well as mine; and I have done my share. He will soon be too much for me, and I look to Gouda's parson to teach him true piety and useful lore. Is he not of more value than many sparrows?"

Gerard started and stammered an affirmation. For she waited for his reply.

"You wonder," continued she, "to hear me quote Holy Writ so glib. I have pored over it this four years, and why? Not because God wrote it, but because I saw it often in thy hands ere thou didst leave me. Heaven forgive me; I am but a woman. What thinkest thou of this sentence: 'Let your work so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'? What is a saint in a sink better than 'a light under a bushel'?"

"Therefore, since the sheep committed to thy charge bleat for thee and cry, 'Oh, desert us no longer, but come to Gouda manse;' since I, who know thee ten times better than thou knowest thyself, do pledge my soul it is for thy soul's weal to go to Gouda manse—since duty to thy child, too long abandoned, calls thee to Gouda manse—since thy

sovereign, whom Holy Writ again bids thee honour, sends thee to Gouda manse—since the Pope, whom the Church teaches thee to revere, hath absolved thee of thy monkish vows, and orders thee to Gouda manse——”

“Ah!”

“Since thy grey-haired mother watches for thee in dole and care, and turneth oft the hour-glass and sigheth sore that thou comest so slow to her at Gouda manse—since thy brother, withered by thy curse, awaits thy forgiveness and thy prayers for his soul, now lingering in his body, at Gouda manse—take thou up in thine arms the sweet bird wi’ crest of gold that nestles on thy bosom, and give me thy hand; thy sweetheart erst and wife, and now thy friend, the truest friend to thee this night that ere man had; and come with me to Gouda manse!”

“It is the voice of an angel!” cried Clement loudly.

“Then hearken it, and come forth to Gouda manse!”

The battle was won.

Margaret lingered behind, cast her eye rapidly round the furniture, and selected the Vulgate and the psaltery. The rest she sighed at, and let it lie. The shirt of bristles she took and dashed with feeble ferocity on the floor. Then, seeing Gerard watch her with surprise from the outside, she coloured and said, “I am still a woman; ‘little’ will still be ‘spiteful.’”

“Why encumber thyself with those? They are safe.”

Oh, she had a reason. And with this they took the road to Gouda parsonage. The moon and stars were so bright, it seemed almost as light as day.

Suddenly Gerard stopped. “My poor little birds!”

“What of them?”

“They will miss their food. I feed them every day.”

“The child hath a piece of bread in his cowl. Take that and feed them now, against the morn.”



"I will. Nay, I will not. He is as innocent, and nearer to me and to thee."

Margaret drew a long breath. "'Tis well. Hadst taken it, I might have hated thee; I am but a woman."

When they had gone about a quarter of a mile, Gerard sighed. "Margaret," said he, "I must e'en rest; he is too heavy for me."

"Then give him me, and take thou these. Alas! alas! I mind when thou wouldst have run with the child on one shoulder, and the mother on t'other."

And Margaret carried the boy.

"I trow," said Gerard, looking down, "overmuch fasting is not good for a man."

"A many die of it each year, winter time," replied Margaret.

Gerard pondered these simple words, and eyed her askant, carrying the child with perfect ease. When they had got nearly a mile, he said, with considerable surprise, "You thought it was but two butts' length."

"Not I."

"Why, you said so."

"That is another matter." She then turned on him the face of a Madonna. "I lied," said she sweetly. "And to save your soul and body, I'd maybe tell a worse lie than that, at need. I am but a woman. Ah, well, it is but two butts' length from here at any rate."

"Without a lie?"

"Humph! Three, without a lie."

And sure enough, in a few minutes they came up to the manse. A candle was burning in the vicar's parlour. "She is waking still," whispered Margaret.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" said Clement, and stopped to look at it.

"What, in Heaven's name?"

"That little candle, seen through the window at night. Look an it be not like some fair star of size prodigious: it delighteth the eyes and warmeth the heart of those outside."

"Come, and I'll show thee something better," said Margaret, and led him on tiptoe to the window.

They looked in, and there was Catherine kneeling on the hassock, with her "hours" before her.

"Folk can pray out of a cave," whispered Margaret. "Ay, and hit heaven with their prayers; for 'tis for a sight of thee she prayeth, and thou art here. Now, Gerard, be prepared; she is not the woman you knew her; her children's troubles have greatly broken the brisk, light-hearted soul. And I see she has been weeping e'en now; she will have given thee up, being so late.

"Let me get to her," said Clement hastily, trembling all over.

"That door! I will bide here."

When Gerard was gone to the door, Margaret, fearing the sudden surprise, gave one sharp tap at the window, and cried, "Mother!" in a loud, expressive voice that Catherine read at once. She clasped her hands together, and had half risen from her kneeling posture when the door burst open, and Clement flung himself wildly on his knees at her knees, with his arms out to embrace her. She uttered a cry such as only a mother could. "Ah! my darling, my darling!" and clung sobbing round his neck. And true it was, she saw neither a hermit, a priest, nor a monk, but just her child, lost, and despaired of, and in her arms. And after a little while Margaret came in, with wet eyes and cheeks, and a holy calm of affection settled by degrees on those sore troubled ones. And they sat all three together, hand in hand, murmuring sweet and loving converse: and he who sat in the middle drank right and

left their true affection and their humble but genuine wisdom, and was forced to eat a good nourishing meal, and at daybreak was packed off to a snowy bed, and by and by awoke, as from a hideous dream, friar and hermit no more, Clement no more, but Gerard Eliassoen, parson of Gouda.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

MARGARET went back to Rotterdam long ere Gerard awoke, and actually left her boy behind her. She sent the faithful, sturdy Reicht off to Gouda directly with a vicar's gray frock and large felt hat, and with minute instructions how to govern her new master.

Then she went to Jorian Ketel; for she said to herself, "He is the closest I ever met, so he is the man for me," and in concert with him she did two mortal sly things; yet not, in my opinion, virulent, though she thought they were; but if I am asked what were these deeds without a name, the answer is, that as she, "who was 'but a woman,' kept them secret till her dying day, I, who am a man—*Verbum non amplius addam.*"

She kept away from Gouda parsonage.

Things that pass little noticed in the heat of argument sometimes rankle afterwards; and when she came to go over all that had passed, she was offended at Gerard thinking she could ever forget the priest in the some time lover. "For what did he take me?" said she. And this raised a great shyness which really she would not otherwise have felt, being downright innocent. And pride sided with modesty, and whispered, "Go no more to Gouda parsonage." She left little Gerard there to complete the conquest her maternal heart ascribed to him, not to her own eloquence and sagacity, and to anchor his father for ever to humanity.

But this generous stroke of policy cost her heart dear. She had never yet been parted from her boy an hour, and she felt sadly strange as well as desolate without him. After the first day it became intolerable; and what does the poor soul do, but creep at dark up to Gouda parsonage, and lurk about the premises like a thief till she saw Reicht Heynes in the kitchen alone. Then she tapped softly at the window, and said, "Reicht, for pity's sake bring him out to me unbeknown." With Margaret the person who occupied her thoughts at the time ceased to have a name, and sank to a pronoun.

Reicht soon found an excuse for taking little Gerard out, and there was a scene of mutual rapture, followed by mutual tears when mother and boy parted again.

And it was arranged that Reicht should take him half way to Rotterdam every day, at a set hour, and Margaret meet them. And at these meetings, after the raptures, and after mother and child had gambolled together like a young cat and her first kitten, the boy would sometimes amuse himself alone at their feet, and the two women generally seized this opportunity to talk very seriously about Luke Peterson. This began thus:

"Reicht," said Margaret, "I as good as promised him to marry Luke Peterson. 'Say you the word,' quoth I, 'and I'll wed him.'"

"Poor Luke!"

"Prithee, why poor Luke?"

"To be bandied about so, atwixt yea and nay."

"Why, Reicht, you have not ever been so simple as to cast an eye of affection on the boy, that you take his part?"

"Me?" said Reicht, with a toss of the head.

"Oh, I ask your pardon. Well, then, you can do me a good turn."

"Whist! whisper! that little darling is listening to every word, and eyes like saucers."

On this, both their heads would have gone under one cap.

Two women plotting against one boy? Oh, you great cowardly serpents!

But when these stolen meetings had gone on about five days Margaret began to feel the injustice of it, and to be irritated as well as unhappy.

And she was crying about it when a cart came to her door, and in it, clean as a new penny, his beard close shaved, his hands white as snow, and a little colour in his pale face, sat the Vicar of Gouda in the gray frock and large felt hat she had sent him.

She ran upstairs directly, and washed away all trace of her tears, and put on a cap, which, being just taken out of the drawer, was cleaner, theoretically, than the one she had on, and came down to him.

He seized both her hands and kissed them, and a tear fell upon them. She turned her head away at that to hide her own which started.

"My sweet Margaret," he cried, "why is this? Why hold you aloof from your own good deed? we have been waiting and waiting for you every day, and no Margaret."

"You said things."

"What! when I was a hermit, and a donkey."

"Ay! no matter, you said things. And you had no reason."

"Forget all I said there. Who hearkens the ravings of a maniac? for I see now that in a few months more I should have been a gibbering idiot; yet no mortal could have persuaded me away but you. Oh, what an outlay of wit and goodness was yours! But it is not here I can thank and bless you as I ought. No, it is in the home you have given me, among the sheep whose shepherd you have

made me ; already I love them dearly ; there it is I must thank ' the truest friend ever man had.' So now I say to you as erst you said to me, come to Gouda manse."

"Humph ! we will see about that."

"Why, Margaret, think you I had ever kept the dear child so long, but that I made sure you would be back to him from day to day ? Oh, he curls round my very heart-strings, but what is my title to him compared to thine ? Confess now, thou hast had hard thoughts of me for this."

"Nay, nay, not I. Ah ! thou art thyself again ; wast ever thoughtful of others. I have half a mind to go to Gouda manse, for your saying that."

"Come, then, with half thy mind, 'tis worth the whole of other folk's."

"Well, I daresay I will ; but there is no such mighty hurry," said she coolly (she was literally burning to go).

"Tell me first how you agree with your folk."

"Why, already my poor have taken root in my heart."

"I thought as much."

"And there are such good creatures among them ; simple, and rough, and superstitious, but wonderfully good."

"Oh ! leave you alone for seeing a grain of good among a bushel of ill."

"Whist ! whist ! And, Margaret, two of them have been ill friends for four years, and came to the manse each to get on my blind side. But, give the glory to God, I got on their bright side, and made them friends, and laugh at themselves for their folly."

"But are you in very deed their vicar ? answer me that."

"Certes ; have I not been to the bishop and taken the oath, and rung the church bell, and touched the altar, the missal, and the holy cup before the churchwardens ? And



they have handed me the parish seal ; see, here it is. Nay, 'tis a real vicar inviting a true friend to Gouda manse."

"Then my mind is at ease. Tell me oceans more."

"Well, sweet one, nearest to me of all my parish is a poor cripple that my guardian angel and his (her name thou knowest even by this turning of thy head away) hath placed beneath my roof. Sybrandt and I are that we never were till now, brothers. 'Twould gladden thee, yet sadden thee to hear how we kissed and forgave one another. He is full of thy praises, and wholly in a pious mind ; he says he is happier since his trouble than e'er he was in the days of his strength. Oh ! out of my house he ne'er shall go to any place but heaven."

"Tell me somewhat that happened thyself, poor soul ! All this is good, but yet no tidings to me. Do I not know thee of old ?"

"Well, let me see. At first I was much dazzled by the sunlight, and could not go abroad (owl !), but that is passed ; and good Reicht Heynes—humph !"

"What of her ?"

"This to thine ear only, for she is a diamond. Her voice goes through me like a knife, and all voices seem loud but thine, which is so mellow sweet. Stay, now I'll fit ye with tidings ; I spake yesterday with an old man that conceits he is ill-tempered, and sweats to pass for such with others, but oh ! so threadbare, and the best good heart beneath."

"Why, 'tis a parish of angels," said Margaret ironically.

"Then why dost thou keep out on't ?" retorted Gerard.

"Well, he was telling me there was no parish in Holland where the devil hath such power as at Gouda ; and among his instances, says he, 'We had a hermit, the holiest in Holland ; but being Gouda, the devil came for him this week, and took him, bag and baggage ; not a ha'porth of

him left but a goodish piece of his skin, just for all the world like a hedgehog's, and a piece o' old iron furbished up."

Margaret smiled.

"Ay, but," continued Gerard, "the strange thing is, the cave has verily fallen in; and had I been so perverse as resist thee, it had assuredly buried me dead there where I had buried myself alive. Therefore in this I see the finger of Providence, condemning my late, approving my present, way of life. What sayest thou?"

"Nay, can I pierce the like mysteries? I am but a woman."

"Somewhat more, methinks. This very tale proves thee my guardian angel, and all else avouches it: so come to Gouda manse."

"Well, go you on, I'll follow."

"Nay, in the cart with me."

"Not so."

"Why?"

"Can I tell why and wherefore, being a woman? All I know is I seem—to feel—to wish—to come alone."

"So be it then. I leave thee the cart, being, as thou sayest, a woman, and I'll go a-foot being a man again, with the joyful tidings of thy coming."

When Margaret reached the manse the first thing she saw was the two Gerards together, the son performing his capriccios on the plot, and the father slouching on a chair, in his great hat, with pencil and paper, trying very patiently to sketch him. After a warm welcome he showed her his attempts. "But in vain I strive to fix him," said he, "for he is incarnate quicksilver. Yet do but note his changes, infinite, but none ungracious; all is supple and easy; and how he melteth from one posture to another." He added presently, "Woe to illuminators! looking on thee, sir baby, I see what awkward, lopsided, ungainly toads I and my

fellows painted missals with, and called them cherubs and seraphs." Finally he threw the paper away in despair, and Margaret conveyed it secretly into her bosom.

At night when they sat round the peat fire he bade them observe how beautiful the brass candlesticks and other glittering metals were in the glow from the hearth. Catherine's eyes sparkled at this observation. "And oh, the sheets I lie in here," said he, "often my conscience pricketh me and saith, 'Who art thou to lie in lint like web of snow?' Dives was ne'er so flaxed as I. And to think that there are folk in the world that have all the beautiful things which I have here, yet not content. Let them pass six months in a hermit's cell, seeing no face of man, then will they find how lovely and pleasant this wicked world is, and eke that men and women are God's fairest creatures. Margaret was always fair, but never to my eye so bright as now." Margaret shook her head incredulously. Gerard continued, "My mother was ever good and kind, but I noted not her exceeding comeliness till now."

"Nor I neither," said Catherine; "a score years ago I might pass in a crowd, but not now."

Gerard declared to her that each age had its beauty. "See this mild gray eye," said he, "that hath looked motherly love upon so many of us, all that love hath left its shadow, and that shadow is a beauty which defieeth Time. See this delicate lip, these pure white teeth. See this well-shaped brow, where comeliness just passeth into reverence. Art beautiful in my eyes, mother dear."

"And that is enough for me, my darling. 'Tis time you were in bed, child. Ye have to preach the morn."

And Reicht Heynes and Catherine interchanged a look which said, "We two have an amiable maniac to superintend; calls everything beautiful."

The next day was Sunday, and they heard him preach in

his own church. It was crammed with persons, who came curious, but remained devout. Never was his wonderful gift displayed more powerfully; he was himself deeply moved by the first sight of all his people, and his bowels yearned over this flock he had so long neglected. In a single sermon, which lasted two hours, and seemed to last but twenty minutes, he declared the whole scripture: he terrified the impenitent and thoughtless, confirmed the wavering, consoled the bereaved and the afflicted, uplifted the hearts of the poor, and when he ended, left the multitude standing rapt, and unwilling to believe the divine music of his voice and soul had ceased.

Need I say that two poor women in a corner sat entranced, with streaming eyes.

"Wherever gat he it all?" whispered Catherine, with her apron to her eyes. "By our Lady, not from me."

As soon as they were by themselves Margaret threw her arms round Catherine's neck and kissed her.

"Mother, mother, I am not quite a happy woman, but oh, I am a proud one."

And she vowed on her knees never by word or deed to let her love come between this young saint and Heaven.

Reader, did you ever stand by the seashore after a storm, when the wind happens to have gone down suddenly? The waves cannot cease with their cause; indeed, they seem at first, to the ear to lash the sounding shore more fiercely than while the wind blew. Still we are conscious that inevitable calm has begun, and is now but rocking them to sleep. So it was with those true and tempest-tossed lovers from that eventful night when they went hand in hand beneath the stars from Gouda hermitage to Gouda manse.

At times a loud wave would every now and then come roaring, but it was only memory's echo of the tempest that had swept their lives; the storm itself was over, and the

boiling waters began from that moment to go down, down, down, gently, but inevitably.

This image is to supply the place of interminable details that would be tedious and tame. What best merits attention at present is the general situation, and the strange complication of feeling that arose from it. History itself, though a far more daring story-teller than romance, presents few things so strange as the footing on which Gerard and Margaret now lived for many years. United by present affection, past familiarity, and a marriage irregular but legal; separated by Holy Church and by their own consciences, which sided unreservedly with Holy Church; separated by the Church, but united by a living pledge of affection, lawful in every sense at its date.

And living but a few miles from one another, and she calling his mother "mother." For some years she always took her boy to Gouda on Sunday, returning home at dark. Go when she would, it was always fête at Gouda manse, and she was received like a little queen. Catherine in these days was nearly always with her, and Eli very often. Tergou had so little to tempt them compared with Rotterdam, and at last they left it altogether, and set up in the capital. And thus the years glided; so barren now of striking incidents, so void of great hopes, and free from great fears, and so like one another, that without the help of dates I could scarcely indicate the progress of time.

However, early next year, 1471, the Duchess of Burgundy, with the open dissent but secret connivance of the Duke, raised forces to enable her dethroned brother, Edward the Fourth of England, to invade that kingdom; our old friend Denys thus enlisted, and passing through Rotterdam to the ships, heard on his way that Gerard was a priest, and Margaret alone. On this he told Margaret that marriage was not a habit of his, but that as his

comrade had put it out of his own power to keep troth, he felt bound to offer to keep it for him; "for a comrade's honour is dear to us as our own," said he.

She stared, then smiled. "I choose rather to be still thy she-comrade," said she; "closer acquainted, we might not agree so well." And in her character of she-comrade she equipped him with a new sword of Antwerp make, and a double handful of silver. "I give thee no gold," said she, "for 'tis thrown away as quick as silver, and harder to win back. Heaven send thee safe out of all thy perils; there be famous fair women yonder to beguile thee with their faces, as well as men to hash thee with their axes."

He was hurried on board at La Vere, and never saw Gerard at that time.

In 1473 Sybrandt began to fail. His pitiable existence had been sweetened by his brother's inventive tenderness, and his own contented spirit, which, his antecedents considered, was truly remarkable. As for Gerard, the day never passed that he did not devote two hours to him; reading or singing to him, praying with him, and drawing him about in a soft carriage Margaret and he had made between them. When the poor soul found his end near, he begged Margaret might be sent for. She came at once, and almost with his last breath he sought once more that forgiveness she had long ago accorded. She remained by him till the last; and he died, blessing and blessed, in the arms of the two true lovers he had parted for life. *Tantum religio scit suadere boni.*

1474 there was a wedding in Margaret's house. Luke Peterson and Reicht Heynes.

This may seem less strange if I give the purport of the dialogue interrupted some time back.

Margaret went on to say, "Then in that case you can easily make him fancy you, and for my sake you must, for



my conscience it pricketh me, and I must needs fit him with a wife, the best I know." Margaret then instructed Reicht to be always kind and good-humoured to Luke, and she would be a model of peevishness to him. "But be not thou so simple as run me down," said she. "Leave that to me. Make thou excuses for me; I will make myself black enow." Reicht received these instructions like an order to sweep a room, and obeyed them punctually.

When they had subjected poor Luke to this double artillery for a couple of years, he got to look upon Margaret as his fog and wind, and Reicht as his sunshine; and his affections transferred themselves, he scarce knew how or when. On the wedding day Reicht embraced Margaret, and thanked her almost with tears. "He was always my fancy," said she, "from the first hour I clapped eyes on him."

"Heyday, you never told me that. What, Reicht, are you as sly as the rest?"

"Nay, nay," said Reicht eagerly; "but I never thought you would really part with him to me. In my country the mistress looks to be served before the maid."

Margaret settled them in her shop, and gave them half the profits.

## CHAPTER XXXV

1476 and 7 were years of great trouble to Gerard, whose conscience compelled him to oppose the Pope.

But this drew upon him the bitter enmity of the Franciscans, and they were strong enough to put him into more than one serious difficulty, and inflict many a little mortification on him. In emergencies he consulted Margaret, and she always did one of two things, either she said, "I do not see my way," and refused to guess; or else she gave

him advice that proved wonderfully sagacious. He had genius; but she had marvellous tact.

And where affection came in and annihilated the woman's judgment, he stepped in his turn to her aid. Thus, though she knew she was spoiling little Gerard, and Catherine was ruining him for life, she would not part with him, but kept him at home, and his abilities uncultivated. And there was a shrewd boy of nine years, instead of learning to work and obey, playing about and learning selfishness from their infinite unselfishness, and tyrannising with a rod of iron over two women, both of them sagacious and spirited, but reduced by their fondness for him to the exact level of idiots.

Gerard saw this with pain, and interfered with mild but firm remonstrance; and after a considerable struggle prevailed, and got little Gerard sent to the best school in Europe, kept by one Haaghe at Deventer: this was in 1477. Many tears were shed, but the great progress the boy made at that famous school reconciled Margaret in some degree, and the fidelity of Reicht Heynes, now her partner in business, enabled her to spend weeks at a time hovering over her boy at Deventer. And so the years glided; and these two persons, subjected to as strong and constant a temptation as can well be conceived, were each other's guardian angels, and not each other's tempters.

To be sure the well-greased morality of the next century, which taught that solemn vows to God are sacred in proportion as they are reasonable, had at that time entered no single mind; and the alternative to these two minds was self-denial, or sacrilege.

It was a strange thing to hear them talk with unrestrained tenderness to one another of their boy, and an icy barrier between themselves all the time. Eight years had now passed thus, and Gerard, fairly compared with men in general, was happy. But Margaret was not.

The habitual expression of her face was a sweet pensive-ness, but sometimes she was irritable and a little petulant. She even snapped\* Gerard now and then. And when she went to see him, if a monk was with him she would turn her back and go home.

She hated the monks for having parted Gerard and her, and she inoculated her boy with a contempt for them which lasted him till his dying day.

Gerard bore with her like an angel. He knew her heart of gold, and hoped this ill gust would blow over.

He himself being now the right man in the right place this many years, loving his parishioners, and beloved by them, and occupied from morn till night in good works, recovered the natural cheerfulness of his disposition. To tell the truth, a part of his jocoseness was a blind ; he was the greatest peacemaker, except Mr. Harmony in the play, that ever was born. He reconciled more enemies in ten years than his predecessors had done in three hundred ; and one of his manœuvres in the peacemaking art was to make the quarrellers laugh at the cause of quarrel. So did he undermine the demon of discord. But independently of that, he really loved a harmless joke. He was a wonderful tamer of animals—squirrels, hares, fawns, etc. So half in jest a parishioner who had a mule supposed to be possessed with a devil gave it him and said, “Tame this vagabone, parson, if ye can.” Well, in about six months, Heaven knows how, he not only tamed Jack, but won his affections to such a degree, that Jack would come running to his whistle like a dog. One day, having taken shelter from a shower on the stone settle outside a certain public-house, he heard a toper inside, a stranger, boasting he could take more at a draught than any man in Gouda. He instantly marched in and said, “What, lads, do none of ye take him up for the honour of Gouda ? Shall it be said that there

came hither one from another parish a greater sot than any of us? Nay, then, I your parson do take him up. Go to, I'll find thee a parishioner shall drink more at a draught than thou."

A bet was made; Gerard whistled; in clattered Jack—for he was taught to come into a room with the utmost composure—and put his nose into his backer's hand.

"A pair of buckets!" shouted Gerard, "and let us see which of these two sons of asses can drink most at a draught."

On another occasion two farmers had a dispute whose hay was the best. Failing to convince each other, they said, "We'll ask parson;" for by this time he was their referee in every mortal thing.

"How lucky you thought of me!" said Gerard. "Why, I have got one staying with me who is the best judge of hay in Holland. Bring me a double handful a-piece."

So when they came, he had them into the parlour, and put each bundle on a chair. Then he whistled, and in walked Jack.

"Lord a mercy!" said one of the farmers.

"Jack," said the parson, in the tone of conversation, "just tell us which is the best hay of these two."

Jack sniffed them both, and made his choice directly, proving his sincerity by eating every morsel. The farmers slapped their thighs, and scratched their heads. "To think of we not thinking o' that." And they each sent Jack a truss.

So Gerard got to be called the merry parson of Gouda. But Margaret, who like most loving women had no more sense of humour than a turtle-dove, took this very ill. "What!" said she to herself, "is there nothing sore at the bottom of his heart that he can go about playing the zany?" She could understand pious resignation and content, but not mirth, in true lovers parted. And whilst her woman's

nature was perturbed by this gust (and women seem more subject to gusts than men) came that terrible animal, a busybody, to work upon her. Catherine saw she was not happy, and said to her, "Your boy is gone from you. I would not live alone all my days if I were you."

"*He* is more alone than I," sighed Margaret.

"Oh, a man is a man, but a woman is a woman. You must not think all of him and none of yourself. Near is your kirtle, but nearer is your smock. Besides, he is a priest, and can do no better. But you are not a priest. He has got his parish, and his heart is in that. Bethink thee! Time flies; overstay not thy market. Wouldst not like to have three or four more little darlings about thy knee now they have robbed thee of poor little Gerard, and sent him to yon nasty school?" And so she worked upon a mind already irritated.

Margaret had many suitors ready to marry her at a word or even a look, and among them two merchants of the better class, Van Schelt and Oostwagen. "Take one of those two," said Catherine.

"Well, I will ask Gerard if I may," said Margaret one day, with a flood of tears; "for I cannot go on the way I am."

"Why, you would never be so simple as ask *him*?"

"Think you I would be so wicked as marry without his leave?"

Accordingly she actually went to Gouda, and after hanging her head, and blushing, and crying, and saying she was miserable, told him his mother wished her to marry one of those two; and if he approved of her marrying at all, would he use his wisdom, and tell her which he thought would be the kindest to the little Gerard of those two; for herself, she did not care what became of her.

Gerard felt as if she had put a soft hand into his body

and torn his heart out with it. But the priest with a mighty effort mastered the man. In a voice scarcely audible he declined this responsibility. "I am not a saint or a prophet," said he; "I might advise thee ill. I shall read the marriage service for thee," faltered he; "it is my right. No other would pray for thee as I should. But thou must choose for thyself; and oh! let me see thee happy. This four months past thou hast not been happy."

"A discontented mind is never happy," said Margaret.

She left him, and he fell on his knees, and prayed for help from above.

Margaret went home pale and agitated. "Mother," said she, "never mention it to me again, or we shall quarrel."

"He forbade you? Well, more shame for him, that is all."

"He forbid me? He did not condescend so far. He was as noble as I was paltry. He would not choose for me for fear of choosing me an ill husband. But he would read the service for my groom and me; that was his right. Oh, mother, what a heartless creature I was!"

"Well, I thought not he had that much sense."

"Ah, you go by the poor soul's words, but I rate words as air when the face speaketh to mine eye. I saw the priest and the true lover a-fighting in his dear face, and his cheek pale with the strife, and oh! his poor lip trembled as he said the stout-hearted words—Oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! oh!" And Margaret burst into a violent passion of tears.

Catherine groaned. "There, give it up without more ado," said she. "You two are chained together for life; and if God is merciful, that won't be for long; for what are you? neither maid, wife, nor widow."

"Give it up?" said Margaret; "that was done long ago. All I think of now is comforting him; for now I have been and made him unhappy too, wretch and monster that I am."



## CHAPTER XXXVI

So the next day they both went to Gouda. And Gerard, who had been praying for resignation all this time, received her with peculiar tenderness as a treasure he was to lose; but she was agitated and eager to let him see without words that she would never marry, and she fawned on him like a little dog to be forgiven. And as she was going away she murmured, "Forgive! and forget! I am but a woman."

He misunderstood her, and said, "All I bargain for is, let me see thee content; for pity's sake, let me not see thee unhappy as I have this while."

"My darling, you never shall again," said Margaret, with streaming eyes, and kissed his hand.

He misunderstood this too at first; but when month after month passed, and he heard no more of her marriage, and she came to Gouda comparatively cheerful, and was even civil to Father Ambrose, a mild benevolent monk from the Dominican convent hard by—then he understood her; and one day he invited her to walk alone with him in the sacred paddock; and before I relate what passed between them, I must give its history. When Gerard had been four or five days at the manse, looking out of window he uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Mother, Margaret, here is one of my birds: another, another; four, six, nine. A miracle! a miracle!"

"Why, how can you tell your birds from their fellows?" said Catherine.

"I know every feather in their wings. And see; there is the little darling whose claw I gilt, bless it!"

And presently his rapture took a serious turn, and he saw Heaven's approbation in this conduct of the birds as he did in the fall of the cave. This wonderfully kept alive his friendship for animals; and he enclosed a paddock,

and drove all the sons of Cain from it with threats of excommunication. "On this little spot of earth we'll have no murder," said he. He tamed leverets and partridges, and little birds, and hares, and roe-deer. He found a squirrel with a broken leg; he set it with infinite difficulty and patience; and during the cure showed it repositories of acorns, nuts, chestnuts, etc. And this squirrel got well and went off, but visited him in hard weather, and brought a mate, and next year little squirrels were found to have imbibed their parents' sentiments, and of all these animals each generation was tamer than the last. This set the good parson thinking, and gave him the true clue to the great successes of mediæval hermits in taming wild animals. He kept the key of this paddock, and never let any man but himself enter it; nor would he even let little Gerard go there without him or Margaret. "Children are all little Cains," said he.

In this oasis, then, he spoke to Margaret, and said, "Dear Margaret, I have thought more than ever of thee of late, and have asked myself why I am content, and thou unhappy."

"Because thou art better, wiser, holier than I; that is all," said Margaret promptly.

"Our lives tell another tale," said Gerard thoughtfully. "I know thy goodness and thy wisdom too well to reason thus perversely. Also I know that I love thee as dear as thou, I think, lovest me. Yet am I happier than thou. Why is this so?"

"Dear Gerard, I am as happy as a woman can hope to be this side the grave."

"Not so happy as I. Now for the reason. First, then, I am a priest, and this, the one great trial and disappointment God giveth me along with so many joys, why, I share it with a multitude. For alas! I am not the only

priest by thousands that must never hope for entire earthly happiness. Here, then, thy lot is harder than mine."

"But, Gerard, I have my child to love. Thou canst not fill thy heart with him as his mother can. So you may set this against you."

"And I have ta'en him from thee; it was cruel, but he would have broken thy heart one day if I had not. Well then, sweet one, I come to where the shoe pincheth, methinks. I have my parish, and it keeps my heart in a glow from morn till night. There is scarce an emotion that my folk stir not up in me many times a day. Often their sorrows make me weep, sometimes their perversity kindles a little wrath, and their absurdity makes me laugh, and sometimes their flashes of unexpected goodness do set me all of a glow, and I could hug 'em. Meantime thou, poor soul, sittest with heart——"

"Of lead, Gerard; of very lead."

"See now, how unkind thy lot compared with mine. Now how if thou couldst be persuaded to warm thyself at the fire that warmeth me."

"Ah, if I could?"

"Hast but to will it. Come among my folk. Take in thine hand the alms I set aside, and give it with kind words; hear their sorrows: they shall show you life is full of troubles, and as thou sayest truly, no man or woman without their thorn this side the grave. Indoors I have a map of Gouda parish. Not to o'erburden thee at first, I will put twenty housen under thee with their folk. What sayest thou? but for thy wisdom I had died a dirty maniac, and ne'er seen Gouda manse, nor pious peace. Wilt profit in turn by what little wisdom I have to soften her lot to whom I do owe all?"

Margaret assented warmly, and a happy thing it was for the little district assigned to her; it was as if an angel had

descended on them. Her fingers were never tired of knitting or cutting for them, her heart of sympathising with them. And that heart expanded and waved its drooping wings; and the glow of good and gentle deeds began to spread over it; and she was rewarded in another way by being brought into more contact with Gerard, and also with his spirit. All this time malicious tongues had not been idle. "If there is nought between them more than meets the eye, why doth she not marry?" etc. And I am sorry to say our old friend Joan Ketel was one of these coarse sceptics. And now one winter evening she got on a hot scent. She saw Margaret and Gerard talking earnestly together on the Boulevard. She whipped behind a tree. "Now I'll hear something," said she; and so she did. It was winter; there had been one of those tremendous floods followed by a sharp frost, and Gerard in despair as to where he should lodge forty or fifty houseless folk out of the piercing cold. And now it was, "Oh, dear, dear Margaret, what shall I do? The manse is full of them, and a sharp frost coming on this night." Margaret reflected, and Joan listened.

"You must lodge them in the church," said Margaret quietly.

"In the church? Profanation."

"No; charity profanes nothing, not even a church; soils nought, not even a church. To-day is but Tuesday. Go save their lives, for a bitter night is coming. Take thy stove into the church, and there house them. We will dispose of them here and there ere the Lord's day."

"And I could not think of that; bless thee, sweet Margaret, thy mind is stronger than mine, and readier."

"Nay, nay, a woman looks but a little way, therefore she sees clear. I'll come over myself to-morrow."

And on this they parted with mutual blessings.

Joan glided home remorseful.

And after that she used to check all surmises to their discredit. "Beware," she would say, "lest some angel should blister thy tongue. Gerard and Margaret paramours? I tell ye they are two saints which meet in secret to plot charity to the poor."

In the summer of 1481 Gerard determined to provide against similar disasters recurring to his poor. Accordingly he made a great hole in his income, and bled his friends (zealous parsons always do that) to build a large Xenodochium to receive the victims of flood or fire. Giles and all his friends were kind, but all was not enough; when lo! the Dominican monks of Gouda, to whom his parlour and heart had been open for years, came out nobly, and put down a handsome sum to aid the charitable vicar.

"The dear good souls," said Margaret; "who would have thought it?"

"Any one who knows them," said Gerard. "Who more charitable than monks?"

"Go to! They do but give the laity back a pig of their own sow."

"And what more do I? What more doth the Duke?"

Then the ambitious vicar must build almshouses for decayed true men in their old age close to the manse, that he might keep and feed them, as well as lodge them. And his money being gone, he asked Margaret for a few thousand bricks, and just took off his coat and turned builder; and as he had a good head, and the strength of a Hercules, with the zeal of an artist, up rose a couple of almshouses parson built. And at this work Margaret would sometimes bring him his dinner, and add a good bottle of Rhenish. And once seeing him run up a plank with a wheelbarrow full of bricks which really most brick-



layers would have gone staggering under, she said, "Times are changed since I had to carry little Gerard for thee."

"Ay, dear one, thanks to thee."

When the first home was finished, the question was, who they should put into it; and being fastidious over it like a new toy, there was much hesitation. But an old friend arrived in time to settle this question.

As Gerard was passing a public-house in Rotterdam one day, he heard a well-known voice. He looked up, and there was Denys of Burgundy, but sadly changed; his beard stained with gray, and his clothes worn and ragged; he had a cuirass still, and gauntlets, but a staff instead of an arbalest. To the company he appeared to be bragging and boasting, but in reality he was giving a true relation of Edward the Fourth's invasion of an armed kingdom with 2,000 men, and his march through the country with armies capable of swallowing him looking on, his battles at Tewkesbury and Barnet, and reoccupation of his capital and kingdom in three months after landing at the Humber with a mixed handful of Dutch, English, and Burgundians.

In this, the greatest feat of arms the century had seen, Deny had shone; and whilst sneering at the warlike pretensions of Charles the Bold, a Duke with an itch but no talent for fighting, and proclaiming the English king the first captain of the age, did not forget to exalt himself.

Gerard listened with eyes glittering affection and fun. "And now," said Denys, "after all these feats, patted on the back by the gallant young Prince of Gloucester, and smiled on by the great captain himself, here I am lamed for life; by what? by the kick of a horse, and this night I know not where I shall lay my tired bones. I had a comrade once in these parts that would not have let me lie far from him; but he turned priest and deserted his sweetheart, so 'tis not likely he would remember his com-



rade. And ten years play sad havoc with our hearts, and limbs, and all." Poor Denys sighed, and Gerard's bowels yearned over him.

"What words are these?" he said, with a great gulp in his throat. "Who grudges a brave soldier supper and bed? Come home with me!"

"Much obliged, but I am no lover of priests."

"Nor I of soldiers; but what is supper and bed between two true men?"

"Not much to you, but something to me. I will come."

"In one hour," said Gerard, and went in high spirits to Margaret, and told her the treat in store, and she must come and share it. She must drive his mother in his little carriage up to the manse with all speed, and make ready an excellent supper. Then he himself borrowed a cart, and drove Denys up rather slowly, to give the women time.

On the road Denys found out this priest was a kind soul, so told him his trouble, and confessed his heart was pretty near broken. "The great use our stout hearts, and arms, and lives till we are worn out, and then fling us away like broken tools." He sighed deeply, and it cost Gerard a great struggle not to hug him then and there, and tell him. But he wanted to do it all like a story-book. Who has not had this fancy once in his life? Why, Joseph had it; all the better for us. They landed at the little house. It was as clean as a penny, the hearth blazing, and supper set.

Denys brightened up. "Is this your house, reverend sir?"

"Well, 'tis my work, and with these hands, but 'tis your house."

"Ah, no such luck," said Denys, with a sigh.

"But I say ay," shouted Gerard. "And what is more, I—" (gulp) "say—" (gulp) "Courage, camarade, le diable est mort!"

Denys started, and almost staggered. "Why, what?"

he stammered, "w—wh—who art thou, that bringest me back the merry words and merry days of my youth?" and he was greatly agitated.

"My poor Denys, I am one whose face is changed, but nought else; to my heart dear, trusty comrade, to my heart." And he opened his arms, with the tears in his eyes. But Denys came close to him, and peered in his face, and devoured every feature; and when he was sure it was really Gerard, he uttered a cry so vehement it brought the women running from the house, and fell upon Gerard's neck, and kissed him again and again, and sank on his knees, and laughed and sobbed with joy so terribly, that Gerard mourned his folly in doing dramas. But the women with their gentle, soothing ways soon composed the brave fellow, and he sat smiling, and holding Margaret's hand and Gerard's. And they all supped together, and went to their beds with hearts warm as a toast; and the broken soldier was at peace, and in his own house, and under his comrade's wing.

His natural gaiety returned, and he resumed his consigne after eight years' disuse, and hobbled about the place enlivening it; but offended the parish mortally by calling the adored vicar comrade, and nothing but comrade.

When they made a fuss about this to Gerard, he just looked in their faces and said, "What does it matter? Break him of swearing, and you shall have my thanks."

This year Margaret went to a lawyer to make her will, for without this, she was told, her boy might have trouble some day to get his own, not being born in lawful wedlock. The lawyer, however, in conversation expressed a different opinion.

"This is the babble of churchmen," said he. "Yours is a perfect marriage, though an irregular one."

He then informed her that throughout Europe, excepting

only the southern part of Britain, there were three irregular marriages, the highest of which was hers, viz., a betrothal before witnesses.\*

"This," said he, "if not followed by matrimonial intercourse, is a marriage complete in form, but incomplete in substance. A person so betrothed can forbid any other banns to all eternity. It has, however, been set aside where a party so betrothed contrived to get married regularly, and children were born thereafter. But such a decision was for the sake of the offspring, and of doubtful justice. However, in your case, the birth of your child closes that door, and your marriage is complete both in form and substance. Your course therefore, is to sue for your conjugal rights; it will be the prettiest case of the century. The law is all on our side, the Church all on theirs. If you come to that, the old Batavian law, which *compelled* the clergy to marry, hath fallen into disuse, but was never formally repealed."

Margaret was quite puzzled. "What are you driving at, sir? Who am I to go to law with?"

"Who is the defendant? Why, the Vicar of Gouda."

"Alas, poor soul! And for what shall I law him?"

"Why, to make him take you into his house, and share bed and board with you, to be sure."

Margaret turned red as fire. "Gramercy for your rede," said she. "What, is yon a woman's part? Constrain a man to be hers by force? That is men's way of wooing, not ours. Say I were so ill a woman as ye think me, I should set myself to beguile him, not to law him;" and she departed, crimson with shame and indignation.

"There is an impracticable fool for you," said the man of law.

Margaret had her will drawn elsewhere, and made her boy safe from poverty, marriage or no marriage.

These are the principal incidents that in ten whole years

befel two peaceful lives, which in a much shorter period had been so thronged with adventures and emotions.

Their general tenor was now peace, piety, the mild content that lasts, not the fierce bliss ever on tiptoe to depart, and above all, Christian charity.

### CHAPTER XXXVII

ON this sacred ground these two true lovers met with an uniformity and a kindness of sentiment which went far to soothe the wound in their own hearts. To pity the same bereaved; to hunt in couples all the ills in Gouda, and contrive and scheme together to remedy all that were remediable; to use the rare insight into troubled hearts which their own troubles had given them, and use it to make others happier than themselves—this was their daily practice. And in this blessed cause their passion for one another cooled a little, but their affection increased. From the time Margaret entered heart and soul into Gerard's pious charities, that affection purged itself of all mortal dross. And as it had now long outlived scandal and misapprehension, one would have thought that so bright an example of pure self-denying affection was to remain long before the world, to show men how nearly religious faith, even when not quite reasonable, and religious charity, which is always reasonable, could raise two true lovers' hearts to the loving hearts of the angels of heaven. But the great Disposer of events ordered otherwise.

Little Gerard rejoiced both his parents' hearts by the extraordinary progress he made at Alexander Haaghe's famous school at Deventer. The last time Margaret returned from visiting him, she came to Gerard flushed with pride. "Oh, Gerard, he will be a great man one day, thanks

to thy wisdom in taking him from us silly women. A great scholar, one Zinthius, came to see the school and judge the scholars, and didn't our Gerard stand up, and not a line in Horace or Terence could Zinthius cite but the boy would follow him with the rest. 'Why, 'tis a prodigy,' says that great scholar; and there was his poor mother stood by and heard it. And he took our Gerard in his arms, and kissed him; and what think you he said?"

"Nay, I know not."

"'Holland will hear of thee one day; and not Holland only, but all the world.' Why, what a sad brow!"

"Sweet one, I am as glad as thou, yet am I uneasy to hear the child is wise before his time. I love him dear; but he is thine idol, and Heaven doth often break our idols."

"Make thy mind easy," said Margaret. "Heaven will never rob me of my child. What I was to suffer in this world I have suffered. For if any ill happened my child or thee, I should not live a week. The Lord He knows this, and He will leave me my boy."

A month had elapsed after this; but Margaret's words were yet ringing in his ears, when, going his daily round of visits to his poor, he was told quite incidentally, and as mere gossip, that the plague was at Deventer, carried thither by two sailors from Hamburg.

His heart turned cold within him. News did not gallop in those days. The fatal disease must have been there a long time before the tidings would reach Gouda. He sent a line by a messenger to Margaret, telling her that he was gone to fetch little Gerard to stay at the manse a little while, and would she see a bed prepared, for he should be back next day. And so he hoped she would not hear a word of the danger till it was all happily over. He borrowed a good horse, and scarce drew rein till he reached

Deventer, quite late in the afternoon. He went at once to the school. The boy had been taken away.

As he left the school he caught sight of Margaret's face at the window of a neighbouring house she always lodged at when she came to Deventer. He ran hastily in to scold her and pack both her and the boy out of the place.

To his surprise the servant told him with some hesitation that Margaret had been there, but was gone.

"Gone, woman?" said Gerard indignantly; "art not ashamed to say so? Why, I saw her but now at the window."

"Oh, if you saw her——"

A sweet voice above said, "Stay him not, let him enter." It was Margaret.

Gerard ran up the stairs to her, and went to take her hand. She drew back hastily. He looked astounded.

"I am displeased," said she coldly. "What makes you here? Know you not the plague is in the town?"

"Ay, dear Margaret; and came straightway to take our boy away."

"What, had he no mother?"

"How you speak to me! I hoped you knew not."

"What, think you I leave my boy unwatched? I pay a trusty woman that notes every change in his cheek when I am not here, and lets me know. I am his mother."

"Where is he?"

"In Rotterdam, I hope, ere this."

"Thank Heaven! And why are you not there?"

"I am not fit for the journey; never heed me; go you home on the instant; I'll follow. For shame of you to come here risking your precious life."

"It is not so precious as thine," said Gerard. "But let that pass; we will go home together, and on the instant."

"Nay, I have some matters to do in the town. Go thou at once, and I will follow forthwith."



"Leave thee alone in a plague-stricken town? To whom speak you, dear Margaret?"

"Nay, then, we shall quarrel, Gerard."

"Methinks I see Margaret and Gerard quarrelling! Why, it takes two to quarrel, and we are but one."

With this Gerard smiled on her sweetly. But there was no kind, responsive glance. She looked cold, gloomy, and troubled. He sighed, and sat patiently down opposite her with his face all puzzled and saddened. He said nothing, for he felt sure she would explain her capricious conduct, or it would explain itself.

Presently she rose hastily, and tried to reach her bedroom, but on the way she staggered and put out her hand. He ran to her with a cry of alarm. She swooned in his arms. He laid her gently on the ground, and beat her cold hands, and ran to her bedroom, and fetched water, and sprinkled her pale face. His own was scarce less pale, for in a basin he had seen water stained with blood; it alarmed him, he knew not why. She was a long time ere she revived, and when she did she found Gerard holding her hand, and bending over her with a look of infinite concern and tenderness. She seemed at first as if she responded to it, but the next moment her eyes dilated, and she cried—

"Ah, wretch, leave my hand; how dare you touch me?"

Gerard, sick and cold at heart, kneeled down, and prayed for help from Heaven to do his duty.

When he rose from his knees his face was pale and old, but deadly calm and patient. He went softly and brought her bed into the room, and laid her gently down and supported her head with pillows. Then he prayed by her side the prayers for the dying, and she said Amen to each prayer. Then for some hours she wandered, but when the fell disease had quite made sure of its prey, her mind

cleared, and she begged Gerard to shrieve her. "For oh, my conscience it is laden," said she sadly.

"Confess thy sins to me, my daughter; let there be no reserve."

"My father," said she sadly, "I have one great sin on my breast this many years. E'en now that death is at my heart I can scarce own it. But the Lord is débonair; if thou wilt pray to Him, perchance He may forgive me."

"Confess it first, my daughter."

"I—alas!"

"Confess it!"

"I deceived thee. This many years I have deceived thee." Here tears interrupted her speech.

"Courage, my daughter, courage," said Gerard kindly, overpowering the lover in the priest.

She hid her face in her hands, and with many sighs told him it was she who had broken down the hermit's cave with the help of Jorian Ketel. "I, shallow, did it but to hinder thy return thither; but when thou sawest therein the finger of God, I played the traitress, and said, 'While he thinks so, he will ne'er leave Gouda manse;' and I held my tongue. Oh, false heart."

"Courage, my daughter; thou dost exaggerate a trivial fault."

"Ah, but 'tis not all. The birds."

"Well?"

"They followed thee not to Gouda by miracle, but by my treason. I said, he will ne'er be quite happy without his birds that visited him in his cell; and I was jealous of them, and cried, and said, these foul little things, they are my child's rivals. And I bought loaves of bread, and Jorian and me we put crumbs at the cave door, and thence went sprinkling them all the way to the manse, and there a heap. And my wiles succeeded, and they came, and thou wast

glad, and I was pleased to see thee glad: and when thou sawest in my guile the finger of Heaven, wicked, deceitful, I did hold my tongue. But *die* deceiving thee? ah, no. I could not. Forgive me if thou canst; I was but a woman. I knew no better at the time. 'Twas writ in my bosom with a very sunbeam, 'Tis good for him to bide at Gouda manse.'"

"Forgive thee, sweet innocent?" sobbed Gerard; "what have I to forgive? Thou hadst a foolish froward child to guide to his own weal, and didst all this for the best. I thank thee and bless thee. But as thy confessor, all deceit is ill in Heaven's pure eye. Therefore thou hast done well to confess and report it; and even on thy confession and penitence the Church, through me, absolves thee. Pass to thy graver faults."

"My graver faults? Alas! alas! Why, what have I done to compare? I am not an ill woman, not a very ill one. If He can forgive me deceiving thee, He can well forgive me all the rest ever I did."

Being gently pressed, she said she was to blame not to have done more good in the world. "I had just begun to do a little," she said, "and now I must go. But I repine not, since 'tis Heaven's will. Only I am so afraid thou wilt miss me." And at this she could not restrain her tears, though she tried hard.

Gerard struggled with his as well as he could; and knowing her life of piety, purity, and charity, and seeing that she could not in her present state realise any sin but her having deceived *him*, gave her full absolution. Then he put the crucifix in her hand, and while he consecrated the oil, bade her fix her mind neither on her merits, nor her demerits, but on Him who died for her on the tree.

She obeyed him with a look of confiding love and submission. And he touched her eyes with the conse-

crated oil, and prayed aloud beside her. Soon after she dozed.

He watched beside her, more dead than alive himself.

When the day broke she awoke, and seemed to acquire some energy. She begged him to look in her box for her marriage lines and for a picture, and bring them both to her. He did so. She then entreated him by all they had suffered for each other, to ease her mind by making a solemn vow to execute her dying requests.

He vowed to obey them to the letter.

"Then, Gerard, let no creature come here to lay me out. I could not bear to be stared at; my very corpse would blush. Also I would not be made a monster of for the worms to sneer at as well as feed on. Also my very clothes are tainted, and shall to earth with me. I am a physician's daughter; and ill becomes me kill folk, being dead, which did so little good to men in the days of health; wherefore lap me in lead, the way I am, and bury me deep! yet not so deep but what one day thou mayst find the way, and lay thy bones by mine.

"Whiles I lived I went to Gouda but once or twice a week. It cost me not to go each day. Let me gain this by dying, to be always at dear Gouda—in the green kirkyard.

"Also they do say the spirit hovers where the body lies; I would have my spirit hover near thee, and the kirkyard is not far from the manse. I am so afeard some ill will happen thee, Margaret being gone.

"And see, with mine own hands I place my marriage lines in my bosom. Let no living hand move them, on pain of thy curse and mine. Then when the angel comes for me at the last day, he shall say, this is an honest woman, she hath her marriage lines (for you know I am your lawful wife, though Holy Church hath come between us), and he will set me where the honest women be. I will not sit

among ill women, no, not in heaven ; for their mind is not my mind, nor their soul my soul. I have stood, unknown, at my window, and heard their talk."

For some time she was unable to say any more, but made signs to him that she had not done. At last she recovered her breath, and bade him look at the picture.

It was the portrait he had made of her when they were young together, and little thought to part so soon. He held it in his hands and looked at it, but could scarce see it. He had left it in fragments, but now it was whole.

"They cut it to pieces, Gerard ; but see, Love mocked at their knives.

"I implore thee with my dying breath, let this picture hang ever in thine eye.

"I have heard that such as die of the plague, unspotted, yet after death, spots have been known to come out ; and oh, I could not bear thy last memory of me to be so. Therefore, as soon as the breath is out of my body, cover my face with this handkerchief, and look at me no more till we meet again, 'twill not be so very long. Oh, promise."

"I promise," said Gerard, sobbing.

"But look on this picture instead. Forgive me ; I am but a woman. I could not bear my face to lie a foul thing in thy memory. Nay, I must have thee still think me as fair as I was true. Hast called me an angel once or twice ; but be just ! did I not still tell thee I was no angel, but only a poor simple woman, that whiles saw clearer than thou because she looked but a little way, and that loves thee dearly, and never loved but thee, and now with her dying breath prays thee indulge her in this, thou that art a man."

"I will. I will. Each word, each wish is sacred."

"Bless thee ! Bless thee ! So then the eyes that now can scarce see thee, they are so troubled by the pest, and the lips that shall not touch thee to taint thee, will still be

before thee, as they were when we were young and thou didst love me."

"When I did love thee, Margaret! Oh, never loved I thee as now."

"Hast not told me so of late."

"Alas! hath love no voice but words? I was a priest; I had charge of thy soul; the sweet offices of a pure love were lawful; words of love imprudent at the least. But now the good fight is won, ah me! Oh, my love, if thou hast lived doubting of thy Gerard's heart, die not so; for never was woman loved so tenderly as thou this ten years past."

"Calm thyself, dear one," said the dying woman, with a heavenly smile. "I know it; only being but a woman, I could not die happy till I had heard thee say so. Ah! I have pined ten years for those sweet words. Hast said them, and this is the happiest hour of my life. I had to die to get them; well I grudge not the price."

From this moment a gentle complacency rested on her fading features, but she did not speak. Then Gerard, who had loved her soul so many years, feared lest she should expire with a mind too fixed on earthly affection. "Oh, my daughter," he cried, "my dear daughter, if indeed thou lovest me as I love thee, give me not the pain of seeing thee die with thy pious soul fixed on mortal things."

"Dearest lamb of all my fold, for whose soul I must answer, oh, think not now of mortal love, but of His who died for thee on the tree. Oh, let thy last look be heavenwards, thy last word a word of prayer."

She turned a look of gratitude and obedience on him.

"What saint?" she murmured; meaning, doubtless, "what saint should she invoke as an intercessor."

"He to whom the saints themselves do pray."

She turned on him one more sweet look of love and sub-



mission, and put her pretty hands together in prayer like a child.

“Jesu!”

This blessed word was her last. She lay with her eyes heavenwards, and her hands put together.

Gerard prayed fervently for her passing spirit. And when he had prayed a long time with his head averted, not to see her last breath, all seemed unnaturally still. He turned his head fearfully. It was so.

She was gone.

Nothing left him now but the earthly shell of as constant, pure, and loving a spirit as ever adorned the earth.

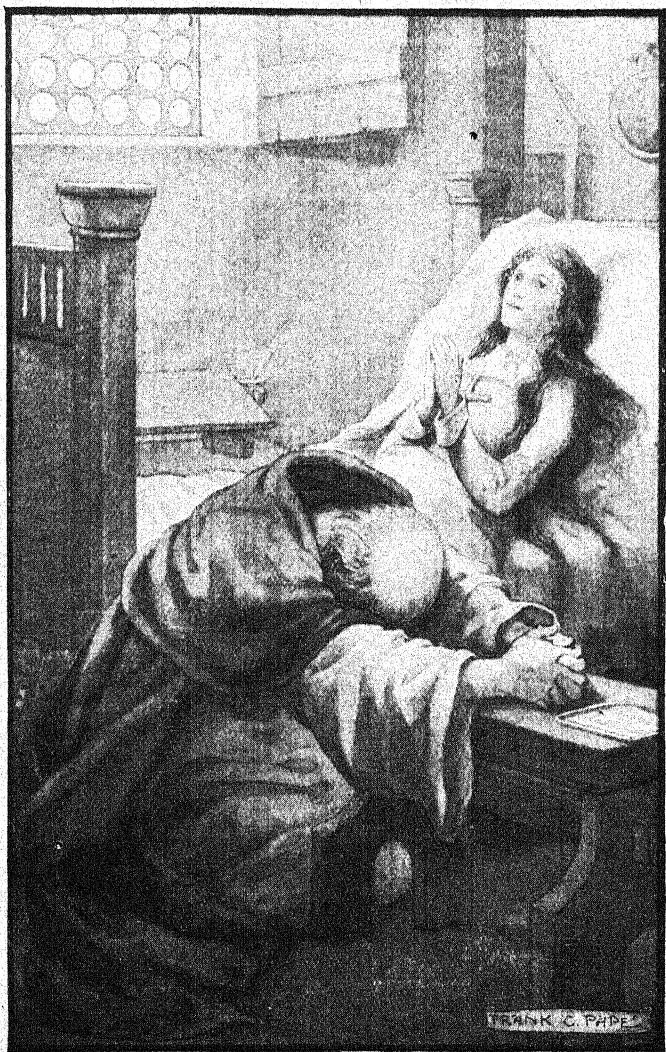
### CHAPTER XXXVIII

A PRIEST is never more thoroughly a priest than in the chamber of death. Gerard did the last offices of the Church for the departed, just as he should have done them for his smallest parishioner. He did this mechanically, then sat down stupefied by the sudden and tremendous blow, and not yet realising the pangs of bereavement. Then in a transport of religious enthusiasm he kneeled and thanked Heaven for her Christian end.

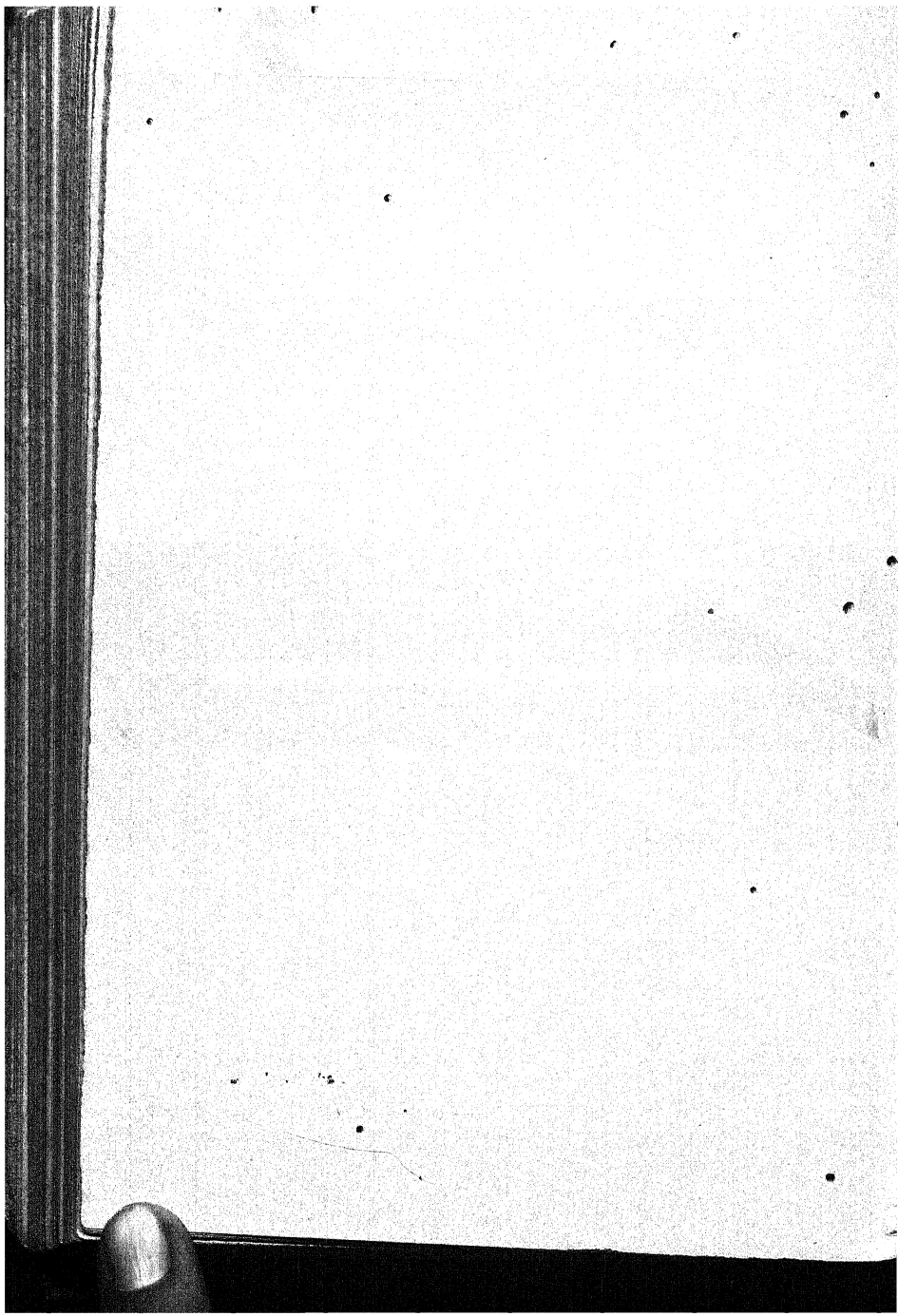
And then all his thought was to take her away from strangers, and lay her in her own churchyard. That very evening a covered cart with one horse started for Gouda, and in it was a coffin, and a broken-hearted man lying with his arms and chin resting on it.

The mourner's short-lived energy had exhausted itself in the necessary preparations, and now he lay crushed, clinging to the cold lead that held her.

The man of whom the cart was hired walked by the



"SHE LAY WITH HER EYES HEAVENWARDS."



horse's head and did not speak to him, and, when he baited the horse, spoke but in a whisper, respecting that mute agony. But when he stopped for the night, he and the landlord made a well-meaning attempt to get the mourner away to take some rest and food. But Gerard repulsed them, and when they persisted, almost snarled at them, like a faithful dog, and clung to the cold lead all night. So then they drew a cloak over him, and left him in peace.

And at noon the sorrowful cart came up to the manse, and there were a full score of parishioners collected with one little paltry trouble or another. They had missed the parson already. And when they saw what it was, and saw their healer so stricken down, they raised a loud wail of grief, and it roused him from his lethargy of woe, and he saw where he was, and their faces, and tried to speak to them. "Oh, my children! my children!" he cried; but, choked with anguish, could say no more.

Yet the next day, spite of all remonstrances, he buried her himself, and read the service with a voice that only trembled now and then. Many tears fell upon her grave. And when the service ended he stayed there standing like a statue, and the people left the churchyard out of respect.

He stood like one in a dream till the sexton, who was, as most men are, a fool, began to fill in the grave without giving him due warning.

But at the sound of earth falling on her Gerard uttered a piercing scream.

The sexton forbore.

Gerard staggered and put his hand on his breast. The sexton supported him, and called for help.

Jorian Ketel, who lingered near mourning his benefactress, ran into the churchyard, and the two supported Gerard into the manse.

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"Ah, Jorian! good Jorian!" said he, "something snapped within me; I felt it, and I heard it; here, Jorian, here;" and he put his hand to his breast.

### CHAPTER XXXIX

A FORTNIGHT after this a pale, bowed figure entered the Dominican convent in the suburbs of Gouda, and sought speech with Brother Ambrose, who governed the convent as deputy, the prior having lately died, and his successor, though appointed, not having arrived.

The sick man was Gerard, come to end life as he began it. He entered as a novice, on probation; but the truth was, he was a failing man, and knew it, and came there to die in peace, near kind and gentle Ambrose, his friend, and the other monks to whom his house and heart had always been open.

His manse was more than he could bear; it was too full of reminiscences of her.

Ambrose, who knew his value, and his sorrow, was not without a kindly hope of curing him, and restoring him to his parish. With this view he put him in a comfortable cell over the gateway, and forbade him to fast or practise any austerities.

But in a few days the new prior arrived, and proved a very Tartar. At first he was absorbed in curing abuses, and tightening the general discipline; but one day, hearing the Vicar of Gouda had entered the convent as a novice, he said, "'Tis well; let him first give up his vicarage then, or go; I'll no fat parsons in my house." The prior then sent for Gerard, and he went to him; and the moment they saw one another, they both started.

"Clement!"

"Jerome!"

## CHAPTER XL

JEROME was as morose as ever in his general character, but he had somewhat softened towards Gerard. All the time he was in England he had missed him more than he thought possible, and since then had often wondered what had become of him. What he heard in Gouda raised his feeble brother in his good opinion; above all, that he had withstood the Pope and the Minorites on heresy, as he called it. But when one of his young monks told him, with tears in his eyes, the cause of Gerard's illness, all his contempt revived. "Dying for a woman?"

He determined to avert this scandal; he visited Clement twice a day in his cell, and tried all his old influence and all his eloquence to induce him to shake off this unspiritual despondency, and not rob the Church of his piety and his eloquence at so critical a period.

Gerard heard him, approved his reasoning, admired his strength, confessed his own weakness, and continued visibly to wear away to the land of the leal. One day Jerome told him he had heard his story, and heard it with pride. "But now," said he, "you spoil it all, Clement; for this is the triumph of earthly passion. Better have yielded to it and repented, than resist it while she lived, and succumb under it now, body and soul."

"Dear Jerome," said Clement, so sweetly as to rob his remonstrance of the tone of remonstrance, "here, I think, you do me some injustice. Passion there is none; but a deep affection, for which I will not blush here, since I shall not blush for it in heaven. Bethink thee, Jerome, the poor dog that dies of grief on his master's grave, is he guilty of passion? Neither am I. Passion had saved my life, and lost my soul. She was my good angel; she sustained me



in my duty and charity; her face encouraged me in the pulpit; her lips soothed me under ingratitude. She intertwined herself with all that was good in my life; and after leaning on her so long, I could not go on alone. And, dear Jerome, believe me I am no rebel against Heaven. It is God's will to release me. When they threw the earth upon her poor coffin, something snapped within my bosom here that mended may not be. I heard it, and I felt it. And from that time, Jerome, no food that I put in my mouth had any savour. With my eyes bandaged now I could not tell thee which was bread, and which was flesh, by eating of it."

"Holy saints!"

"And again, from that same hour my deep dejection left me, and I smiled again. I often smile—why? I read it thus: He in whose hands are the issues of life and death gave me that minute the great summons; 'twas some cord of life snapped in me. He is very pitiful. I should have lived unhappy; but He said, 'No; enough is done, enough is suffered; poor, feeble, loving servant, thy shortcomings are forgiven, thy sorrows touch thine end; come thou to thy rest!' I come, Lord, I come!"

Jerome groaned. "The Church had ever her holy but feeble servants," he said. "Now would I give ten years of my life to save thine. But I see it may not be. Die in peace."

And so it was that in a few days more Gerard lay a-dying in a frame of mind so holy and happy, that more than one aged saint was there to garner his dying words. In the evening he had seen Giles, and begged him not to let poor Jack starve; and to see that little Gerard's trustees did their duty, and to kiss his parents for him, and to send Denys to his friends in Burgundy: "Poor thing, he will feel so strange here without his comrade." And after that

he had an interview with Jerome alone. What passed between them was never distinctly known; but it must have been something remarkable, for Jerome went from the door with his hands crossed on his breast, his high head lowered, and sighing as he went.

The two monks that watched with him till matins related that all through the night he broke out from time to time in pious exclamations, and praises, and thanksgivings; only once they said he wandered, and thought he saw her walking in green meadows with other spirits clad in white, and beckoning him; and they all smiled and beckoned him. And both these monks said (but it might have been fancy) that just before dawn there came three light taps against the wall, one after another, very slow; and the dying man heard them, and said—

“I come, love, I come.”

This much is certain, that Gerard did utter these words, and prepare for his departure, having uttered them. He sent for all the monks who at that hour were keeping vigil. They came, and hovered like gentle spirits round him with holy words. Some prayed in silence for him with their faces touching the ground, others tenderly supported his head. But when one of them said something about his life of self-denial and charity, he stopped him, and addressing them all, said, “My dear brethren, take note that he who here dies so happy holds not these new-fangled doctrines of man’s merit. Oh, what a miserable hour were this to me an if I did! Nay, but I hold, with the Apostles, and their pupils in the Church, the ancient fathers, that ‘we are justified not by our own wisdom, or piety, or the works we have done in holiness of heart, but by faith.’”

Then there was a silence, and the monks looked at one another significantly.

“Please you sweep the floor,” said the dying Christian,

in a voice to which all its clearness and force seemed supernaturally restored.

They instantly obeyed, not without a sentiment of awe and curiosity.

"Make me a great cross with wood ashes."

They strewed the ashes in form of a great cross upon the floor.

"Now lay me down on it, for so will I die."

And they took him gently from his bed, and laid him on the cross of wood ashes.

"Shall we spread out thine arms, dear brother?"

"Now God forbid! Am I worthy of that?"

He lay silent, but with his eyes raised in ecstasy.

Presently he spoke half to them, half to himself.

"Oh," he said, with a subdued but concentrated rapture, "I feel it buoyant. It lifts me floating in the sky whence my merits had sunk me like lead."

Day broke, and displayed his face cast upward in silent rapture, and his hands together, like Margaret's.

And just about the hour she died he spoke his last word in this world.

"Jesu!"

And even with that word—he fell asleep.

They laid him out for his last resting-place.

Under his linen they found a horse-hair shirt.

"Ah!" cried the young monks, "behold a saint!"

Under the hair-cloth they found a long thick tress of auburn hair.

They started and were horrified; and a babel of voices arose, some condemning, some excusing.

In the midst of which Jerome came in, and, hearing the dispute, turned to an ardent young monk called Basil, who was crying scandal the loudest.

"Basil," said he, "is she alive or dead that owned this hair?"

"How may I know, father?"

"Then for aught you know it may be the relic of a saint?"

"Certes it may be," said Basil sceptically.

"You have then broken our rule, which saith, 'Put ill construction on no act done by a brother which can be construed innocently.' Who are you to judge such a man as this was? go to your cell, and stir not out for a week by way of penance."

He then carried off the lock of hair.

And when the coffin was to be closed, he cleared the cell, and put the tress upon the dead man's bosom. "There, Clement," said he to the dead face; and set himself a penance for doing it, and nailed the coffin up himself.

The next day Gerard was buried in Gouda churchyard. The monks followed him in procession from the convent. Jerome, who was evidently carrying out the wishes of the deceased, read the service. The grave was a deep one, and at the bottom of it was a lead coffin. Poor Gerard's, light as a feather (so wasted was he), was lowered, and placed by the side of it.

After the service, Jerome said a few words to the crowd of parishioners that had come to take the last look at their best friend. When he spoke of the virtues of the departed, loud wailing and weeping burst forth, and tears fell upon the coffin like rain.

The monks went home. Jerome collected them in the refectory, and spoke to them thus: "We have this day laid a saint in the earth. The convent will keep his trentals, but will feast, not fast; for our good brother is freed from the burden of the flesh; his labours are over, and he has entered into his joyful rest. I alone shall fast, and do penance; for to my shame I say it, I was unjust to him,

and knew not his worth, till it was too late. And you, young monks, be not curious to inquire whether a lock he bore on his bosom was a token of pure affection or the relic of a saint; but remember the heart he wore beneath; most of all, fix your eyes upon his life and conversation, and follow them as ye may, for he was a holy man."

Thus, after life's fitful fever, these true lovers were at peace. The grave, kinder to them than the Church, united them for ever; and now a man of another age and nation, touched with their fate, has laboured to build their tombstone, and rescue them from long and unmerited oblivion.

He asks for them your sympathy, but not your pity.

No; put this story to a wholesome use.

Fiction must often give false views of life and death. Here, as it happens, curbed by history, she gives you true ones. Let the barrier that kept these true lovers apart prepare you for this, that here on earth there will nearly always be some obstacle or other to your perfect happiness; to their early death apply your Reason and your Faith, by way of exercise and preparation. For, if you cannot bear to be told that these died young, who, had they lived a hundred years, would still be dead, how shall you bear to see the gentle, the loving, and the true glide from your bosom to the grave, and fly from your house to heaven?

Yet this is in store for you. In every age the Master of life and death, who is kinder as well as wiser than we are, has transplanted to heaven, young, earth's sweetest flowers.

I ask your sympathy, then, for their rare constancy and pure affection, and their cruel separation; but not your pity for their early but happy end.

*Beati sunt qui in Domino moriuntur.*

## CHAPTER XLI

IN compliance with a custom I despise, but have not the spirit to resist, I linger on the stage to pick up the smaller fragments of humanity I have scattered about; *i.e.*, some of them, for the wayside characters have no claim on me; they have served their turn if they have persuaded the reader that Gerard travelled from Holland to Rome through human beings, and not through a population of dolls.

Eli and Catherine lived to a great age; lived so long, that both Gerard and Margaret grew to be dim memories. Giles also was longævous; he went to the court of Bavaria, and was alive there at ninety, but had somehow turned into bones and leather, trumpet toned.

Cornelis, free from all rivals, and forgiven long ago by his mother, who clung to him more and more now all her brood was scattered, waited and waited and waited for his parents' decease. But Catherine's shrewd word came true; ere she and her mate wore out, this worthy rusted away. At sixty-five he lay dying of old age in his mother's arms, a hale woman of eighty-six. He had lain unconscious a while, but came to himself *in articulo mortis*, and seeing her near him, told her how he would transform the shop and premises as soon as they should be his. "Yes, my darling," said the poor old woman soothingly, and in another minute he was clay, and that clay was followed to the grave by all the feet whose shoes he had waited for.

Denys, broken-hearted at his comrade's death, was glad to return to Burgundy, and there a small pension the court allowed him kept him until unexpectedly he inherited a considerable sum from a relation. He was known in his native place for many years as a crusty old soldier, who could tell good stories of war when he chose, and a bitter railer against women.



Jerome, disgusted with northern laxity, retired to Italy, and, having high connections, became at seventy a mitred abbot. He put on the screw of discipline: his monks revered and hated him. He ruled with iron rod ten years. And one night he died, alone; for he had not found the way to a single heart. The Vulgate was on his pillow, and the crucifix in his hand, and on his lips something more like a smile than was ever seen there while he lived; so that, methinks, at that awful hour he was not quite alone. Requiescat in pace. The Master he served has many servants, and they have many minds, and now and then a faithful one will be a surly one, as it is in these our mortal mansions.

The yellow-haired laddie, Gerard Gerardson, belongs not to Fiction but to History. She has recorded his birth in other terms than mine. Over the tailor's house in the Brede Kirk Straet, she has inscribed:—"Hæc est parva domus natus quâ magnus Erasmus;" and she has written half a dozen lives of him. But there is something left for her yet to do. She has no more comprehended magnum Erasmum, than any other pigmy comprehends a giant, or partisan a judge.

First scholar and divine of his epoch, he was also the heaven-born dramatist of his century. Some of the best scenes in this new book are from his mediæval pen, and illumine the pages where they come; for the words of a genius so high as his are not born to die: their immediate work upon mankind fulfilled, they may seem to lie torpid; but, at each fresh shower of intelligence Time pours upon their students, they prove their immortal race: they revive, they spring from the dust of great libraries; they bud, they flower, they fruit, they seed, from generation to generation, and from age to age.

